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• (1630)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting No. 37 of the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, February 3, 2022, the committee is meeting to study anticipated labour shortages in the Canadian transportation sector.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House Order of November 25, 2021. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

[*English*]

Members of the committee, we have appearing before us as witnesses via video conference in the first hour, from the national supply chain task force, Monsieur Jean Gattuso, task force co-chair, as well as Louise Yako, task force co-chair.

In the second half, from 5:30 to 6:30, from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration we have Jean-Marc Gionet, director general, immigration program guidance, and Ian Gillespie, director, temporary resident policy and programs.

From the Department of Employment and Social Development we have Mr. Andrew Brown, senior assistant deputy minister, skills and employment branch; Mr. Michael MacPhee, assistant deputy minister, temporary foreign workers program; and Mr. Brian Hickey, director general, temporary foreign workers program.

Finally, from the Department of Transport we have Ms. Melanie Vanstone, director general, multimodal and road safety programs.

Before I begin, I'd like to take this opportunity to inform members that all of today's video conference witness participants have completed the necessary audiovisual checks.

We will now begin the opening remarks with the national supply chain task force for five minutes.

The floor is yours.

Ms. Louise Yako (Task Force Co-Chair, National Supply Chain Task Force): Good afternoon, everyone. It's a pleasure to be speaking to you today.

Monsieur Gattuso and I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to speak about the national supply chain task force's

report. We are proud of the work the task force did over its 100-day mandate. Our objective was to provide independent advice through recommendations on actions aimed to increase competition, access, reliability, resiliency, redundancy, efficiency and investment in the national transportation supply chain, while also promoting continued international transportation services to and from Canada.

The recommendations developed are based on the perspectives shared by industry through consultation and written submissions. We were also guided by the principle of creating a transportation supply chain that would be governed and operated in the best interests of the country, given Canada's reliance on international trade for our prosperity.

With respect to the objective of the TRAN committee, today we will share what we heard from industry about the labour shortage impacting the national transportation supply chain and the recommendations related to addressing these challenges that we provided to the Minister of Transport in our final report.

One of the key structural issues identified through our consultations with industry is that the transportation sector is facing acute labour shortages. While they are an issue for all transportation modes, they are particularly problematic for the rail and trucking sectors. To give some perspective on the scale of this issue, as noted by the Conference Board of Canada, the transportation sector is more reliant on older workers compared to the total economy, and more than 260,000 of its workers will be retiring in the next 20 years. Moreover, from 2021 to 2030, the number of workers joining the transportation workforce will be insufficient to offset the losses from retirees.

The transportation sector relies inordinately on immigrants, and its current workforce is predominantly male. We heard that the labour issues facing our supply chain system are complex and cannot be tied to a single broken cog in the system. A mismatch between available and required skills, lack of appropriate training programs and insufficient training funding were consistently raised as significant concerns by various supply chain representatives. They also mentioned lack of awareness of certain occupations as being particularly problematic.

Labour shortages are a pressing issue across all sectors. We have seen that when the transportation sector is not functioning properly, products do not make their way to consumers, materials do not make their way to producers, and notably the follow-on impacts affect all Canadians.

A key example of this dysfunction is that 50% of our trade is dependent on trucking, and we are missing more than 25,000 drivers. Further, there is not a collective view that trucking is a skilled trade, which dissuades potential candidates and impacts training funding. Trucking is just one example of the system not being set up to effectively attract and retain talent.

• (1635)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Gattuso (Task Force Co-Chair, National Supply Chain Task Force): A reliable and efficient supply chain is critical to the economic well-being of our country. I repeat: it must be reliable and efficient.

The transport sector is responsible for facilitating trade, which comprised 61% of Canada's GDP in 2021, a year in which the supply chain suffered significant reductions in service due to human-caused mischief and natural disasters.

Regardless of the advancements being made through automation and artificial intelligence, stakeholders believe labour will continue to be a limiting factor for a reliable and efficient supply chain unless drastic measures are taken.

To respond to these issues we have consistently heard that collaboration among all levels of government and the private sector should be prioritized to better understand labour market needs across the country and to meet current and future workforce requirements.

Collaboration between the public and private sectors was seen as an opportunity to advance and promote education and skills training in supply chain-related occupations. This collaboration would also have to involve provinces and territories as education and training fall under their jurisdiction.

[*English*]

Taking into account the struggles and suggestions from industry, our final report contains both immediate actions and long-term recommendations that reflect what we heard.

In the short term, within two years, we have recommended that the government develop a transportation supply chain labour strategy to identify current issues and develop long-term and lasting solutions.

Additionally, we have brought forward other immediate actions that the government could pursue to provide some immediate relief. These include that the federal government seek to expand existing labour programs and examine a way to attract under-represented groups; continue to support and, if possible, expand the temporary foreign worker program on an urgent basis as it applies to workers in the transportation supply chain; expedite refugee and immigration processing for those eligible to work in supply chain-related businesses; and finally, support organizations and businesses to help acclimatize new Canadians to Canadian work and social environments.

Looking to the long term, we recommend that the government finalize the transportation supply chain labour strategy and, at a minimum, include direction related to immigration, domestic labour participation, refugee training and education, productivity and automation.

The strategy should reinforce the government's willingness to adapt policies, remove barriers, provide adequate training, embrace collaboration, promote the continuous growth and upscaling of our workforce, and invest in our businesses to take advantage of technology.

[*Translation*]

Our final report provides further details on each recommendation and the nuances of the problems faced by the supply chain system.

• (1640)

[*English*]

While labour is only a single component of our final report, we would like to thank you for giving us the time to share our findings on the matter. We look forward to any questions you may have.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gattuso.

[*English*]

Thank you very much, Ms. Yako, for your opening remarks.

We will begin our line of questioning with Mr. Jeneroux.

The floor is yours. You have six minutes.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's good to be back and see everybody at the transport committee. I really appreciate your showing up.

I want to ask a quick question out of the gate. There are 13 immediate recommendations. During your press conference and subsequent media interviews, there were a lot of comments, particularly by you, Ms. Yako, that they are urgent.

Of those 13, have you seen action on all 13 so far from the government?

Ms. Louise Yako: We submitted our report early in October. The government has no responsibility to report back to Jean and me, so—

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: I'm sorry to interrupt, but I have only a limited amount of time.

Have you witnessed it? I imagine you're still paying attention and closely monitoring what's happened from your report.

Ms. Louise Yako: I'm aware that Transport Canada has asked for submissions from stakeholders, but I have not been watching this particularly closely. It's something I can't comment on.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Perfect. Thank you. I will move on.

The report states, "Roadblocks to private sector innovation must be removed...We must ensure that governments do not place barriers that could stifle this type of much-needed innovation."

One recommendation of the report is to create the supply chain office. The majority of the task force recommendations focus on government intervention versus getting government out of the way.

I will ask the question, and hopefully you can provide some insight on it. Do you really think we need to create a new office that will, obviously, cost taxpayers more and will likely lead to more Ottawa interference?

Ms. Louise Yako: I can see that Jean is answering.

Mr. Jean Gattuso: I'm here, Louise. I'll take over this question.

First, going back to government, you saw governments in the last few days taking a position on immigration. That's one thing we were pushing in our report when we were talking about labour. We heard from the stakeholders that we need more immigration.

Going back to your question on the supply chain office, when you look at what we lost in the last 10 years in terms of shared trade in the world, especially with the U.S.—three share points—you could easily pay the supply chain office and get results. When you start losing shares, you need immediate action.

Remember that the objective of the supply chain office is making sure that within different departments of the government there are KPIs that are oriented to supply chains. One of the basic things in this report is that trade is important. It's 61% of GDP.

If we start losing shares, Canadians will be affected by it.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Thanks, Mr. Gattuso.

First of all, I probably should start with commending you guys on the report. A lot of hard work and a lot of time have been put into this report.

The one stickler that I keep hearing about is the supply chain office. I spoke with somebody today who said they're unsure how more government bureaucracy will continue to help the problem.

They looked further down the road and saw that this would be an additional burden. That's the concern, at least, that I'm hearing.

I'm going to move on to my next question, but if there's more to add to that, Mr. Gattuso, I'd welcome you to chime in.

Obviously, the railways and ports are owned and operated by the private sector. An outcome that's seen from your report is that there seems to be more incentivization from the government for the creation of additional rail lines and ports.

Is that a fair comment?

Maybe we'll start with you, Ms. Yako. Is that your interpretation of what you heard?

Ms. Louise Yako: We heard that physical infrastructure is required, but it's not physical infrastructure alone that is going to solve our supply chain issues. It is going to be additional co-operation between the private sector and government.

To go back to your earlier question about the supply chain office, there is a need for better federal coordination among the departments, because there are a number of federal departments that touch and affect supply chain operations and that have policies that affect supply chains, and there's currently a lack of coordination. Rather than an additional layer of bureaucracy, we see the supply chain office as cutting through some of that bureaucracy and, potentially, taking over responsibility. This is so there's not an add-on effect, necessarily, but more efficiency in how those regulations that affect supply chains are developed, monitored and managed.

• (1645)

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Mr. Gattuso, do you want to get in on the supply chain office?

Mr. Jean Gattuso: To add to Louise's comments, it is key. Many departments touch the supply chain, and they play a role in it. If you talk about the borders, as an example, and the CFIA, it's key for them that we also put KPIs in their performance, because the supply chain office brings together all the KPIs. Because we are a trading country, we also need to continue to grow our business and maintain our supply chain.

Remember, our project was to have an efficient and fluid supply chain. That was our mandate, so we came up with this recommendation. It's key in our report.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gattuso.

[English]

Next, we have Mr. Rogers. The floor is yours. You have six minutes.

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses appearing today. It's good to have you here.

First of all, I should commend you on some great work in your report on the long- and short-term recommendations as we try to resolve the supply chain issues.

We've heard from many different witnesses over the last number of meetings. They're from all sectors of the transportation corridors, the airline industry, marine industry and trucking, and all the people who are involved in moving goods and services for our country.

I want to ask you this question. Either one of you can feel free to comment on the questions I ask.

In your view, after all the work you've done, is the shortage of truck drivers the biggest problem in the transportation sector, or do you see other shortages as equally problematic? If so, which ones are they?

Mr. Jean Gattuso: We have identified trucking. Fifty per cent of our trade depends on trucking, so if we're missing 25,000 drivers, and trucking is key, then.... You have 23% that is maritime labour in the port, and you have 12% that is rail. If you take just rail and trucking, you have 62% of our trade that depends on those, so those sectors are key.

Don't forget that our internal and external customers look at this country as being a big plant. We need to service internal and external customers. If we don't give our external customers service, they won't buy from Canada anymore. We need to make sure that from the plant to the port or to the U.S., we meet the requirements of our customers. If there are delays for weeks and weeks, people will not buy from Canada anymore.

We heard things like that from the stakeholders. We met people. They were talking about their customers. The U.S. is also challenging us. We spent one week in the U.S. talking about the type of service Canada is giving.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Ms. Yako, do you want to add to that?

Ms. Louise Yako: I think your question is this: Is there a ranking in terms of the shortages for the particular modes? While Jean is absolutely correct that we have a very significant shortage of truck drivers, each mode serves a specific purpose, and each mode has identified labour shortages as being critical. I wouldn't necessarily rank one over the other. I'd say they're all very significant. They're all critical and necessary to be filled.

• (1650)

Mr. Churence Rogers: Given your comment there, can you comment on recent changes to the temporary foreign worker program? Do you think this will help address labour shortages in the transportation sector?

Ms. Louise Yako: The temporary foreign worker program is designed for temporary shortages. By definition, the shortages that we are talking about are long-term and significant. They require a permanent solution. While the increase in temporary foreign workers may provide a short-term bridge, we require a much longer-term perspective on labour shortages.

Mr. Jean Gattuso: Don't forget that if you're talking about drivers, you need to train them. It's a process. Driving is not recognized right now as a profession, and in terms of adding something, you saw in our report that we're pushing for a program and for the federal government and the provinces to work together. We need to train drivers.

For sure, these people who are coming in cannot be temporary. Therefore, it's key to also get drivers into this country through our immigration program.

Mr. Churence Rogers: The other question I have is about automation. Did you identify opportunities for greater automation to help deal with labour shortages? If so, can you elaborate on that?

Ms. Louise Yako: We didn't specifically identify situations in which automation will be helpful, but clearly vehicle automation is a key area that is expanding, so there may be some automation. The rail lines have identified ways they could automate inspections, for example, but there are regulations in place that prohibit them from doing that.

There are opportunities that were identified by stakeholders. We didn't necessarily identify them specifically in the report.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Okay.

Mr. Jean Gattuso: You're right, Louise. Many stakeholders did talk about automation.

One area in which it's well developed right now is in automatic warehouses. People are having a hard time getting lift-truck drivers, so they're investing a lot of money in those warehouses.

Again, I doubt we're going to see 43-footers going on the highway without any drivers these days. That's why we need drivers.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Yako and Mr. Gattuso, before we move on to the next member of the committee, would it be possible for you to mute your microphones after you're done speaking? It's just for our interpreters, to make sure there's no overlap.

Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, the floor is yours. You have six minutes.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Yako and Mr. Gattuso.

I would like to congratulate you on the work you have done. It is important to make sure the supply chain is efficient. A lot of people in our ridings are talking to us about this, and we are all feeling the consequences. I wanted to point out that you have done an important piece of work. I hope your recommendations will make it possible to achieve better results.

With that said, you referred in your opening remarks to the subject of workforce training and the fact that education falls under the jurisdiction of the provinces and territories. You also talked about the question of professional organizations, which also fall under the jurisdiction of the provinces. At other times, you raised the issue of immigration. In Quebec, economic immigration is under provincial jurisdiction.

How did you manage to reconcile each of their prerogatives in framing your recommendations and the vision you have presented to us?

Mr. Jean Gattuso: First, we met with industry actors in several provinces. We did not meet with each of the provinces, since only some of them had made submissions. However, we talked about a national problem, which will mean we are able to look outside for workers.

If we want to stay in business, it takes people and it takes programs to support them. We are well aware that some powers are federal and others are provincial. We did not try to put ourselves between two jurisdictions. We identified the problem, and we stated that training had to be offered and we had to invest together to do that. The entire country will win as a result. I think that has to be your starting point.

As I said, work as a truck driver is not recognized as a skilled trade, so there are no subsidies for this type of work. The training required by transportation companies has to be paid for by the drivers themselves. That is so important. We do \$774 billion in trade with the Americans and the roads are important. It takes drivers and they have to be trained.

We determined that in order to achieve this, collaborative work had to be encouraged. In fact, our report is entitled “Action. Collaboration. Transformation.” What collaboration means is working hand in hand for the future of the country.

• (1655)

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Gattuso.

Essentially, your task force heard from people who described their challenges, and then you made recommendations based on the testimony heard and your findings, and on your judgment.

I just wanted to clarify that ultimately, you carried out your mandate by describing potential solutions to the current problems, without necessarily checking which jurisdiction was involved. You are a

federal task force. I am not criticizing, I'm making an observation, in telling you that the federal government may not be able to implement some of your recommendations. That doesn't mean they are not useful or worth considering, of course. I just wanted to point this out.

At page 18 of the report, you actually refer to the need to collaborate with the provinces and territories on the subject of retaining truck drivers. The drivers we have heard at the committee said that the aging of truck drivers was the key element in their view.

In the Bloc Québécois, we think that of all the proposals heard, one of the avenues worth considering would be to provide tax credits or other measures to encourage older workers to stay in the labour market, so it would be more attractive for them to remain instead of leaving.

I would like to know how you see that kind of recommendation, or at least that kind of program.

[English]

Ms. Louise Yako: Actually that aligns with one of the recommendations in the report. We identified bringing retired workers back to work even on a part-time basis as an opportunity, and I believe we identified financial incentives or eliminating barriers or disincentives for older workers to remain in the workforce, so we're in complete alignment.

[Translation]

The Chair: You are on mute, Mr. Gattuso.

Mr. Jean Gattuso: Our report says clearly that for experienced drivers to want to remain in the labour market, they would need to be given a tax incentive. There is a labour shortage at present, and these experienced workers would be useful until enough drivers have been trained.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, very much, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[English]

Next we have Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Bachrach, the floor is yours. You have six minutes.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the presentations. I also wanted to thank Ms. Yako for the briefing she gave me on the report the task force put together. Unfortunately, we had some very poor northern B.C. cell service at the time, so it was a bit fragmented on my end, but I appreciated the overview.

I wanted to ask a few questions based on the report. There were a few areas I found particularly interesting. One is around labour dispute delays. I note in the list of stakeholders consulted that a number of labour organizations were part of the conversation. The report states:

The Minister of Labour should urgently convene a council of experts to develop a new collaborative labour relations paradigm that would reduce the likelihood of strikes, threat of strikes, or lockouts that risk the operation or fluidity of the national transportation supply chain.

We would all want that and I think if it was possible, we should have done it a lot of years ago.

What's envisioned here? This description is fairly vague. I'm wondering what sorts of ideas you heard, especially from the labour folks you consulted as part of this work.

• (1700)

Ms. Louise Yako: By the way, it's nice to see you again, Mr. Bachrach.

One of the things we heard very consistently from many of the stakeholders was a need for certainty, and certainty in some cases actually trumped efficiency. Certainty they equated with reliability, and reliability is now almost more important than competitiveness or cost. One of the main reasons for the lack of reliability that was identified was related to the fact that there are significant disruptions that can take place as a consequence of lockouts or the risk of strikes.

What we tried to do with that recommendation was essentially to say that if as a country we want to continue to be known as a reliable trading partner, we have to do everything we can to try to control man-made or controllable disruptions. One of those is obviously through the elimination of labour disruptions. We didn't have a particular solution in mind because none of us is an expert in labour relations.

What we wanted to bring to the forefront was the fact that this is an issue that needs to be addressed urgently, and the experts on this are the Minister of Labour, union leaders and employers, and they're the ones who are going to have to figure out how to do that, because of how important having a reliable supply chain is to the future of our country.

Mr. Jean Gattuso: If I can add to that, just to give you an example, a boat can take 10 days to cross the ocean to come to Canada. Legislation will permit 72 hours to announce there's either a strike or a lockout. How can we be considered a reliable supplier when a boat is coming through the ocean and he's like four days near Canada and it's being announced that a couple of days later there will be a strike. Our principle was to be a reliable and fluid partner. We need to redefine ourselves to be recognized as that.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: I would offer that I think the way we build that reputation as a reliable, efficient and certain partner is by having good labour relations, and I think a lot of that responsibility rests with the government and with the companies in the supply chain.

Perhaps I'll move on to first nation consultation. I noted that the task force found that first nation consultation was outside the scope of its work given the short timeline, yet in the report there are recommendations that pertain very directly to first nations. I also would offer, because labour shortages are one of the big concerns expressed in this report, that indigenous communities in the region I represent have some of the highest unemployment rates of any communities. It seems like a tremendous opportunity to create em-

ployment opportunities in indigenous communities and indigenous nations, yet that's not reflected in the recommendations.

Could you talk about the decision that was made not to consult even indigenous leadership organizations in Canada as part of the scope of this project?

Ms. Louise Yako: Well, we did consult with the AFN. If you look at our mandate, it asked us to speak with industry stakeholders specifically, but we did extend consultations to the AFN. The AFN were very clear that our discussions with them could not be considered consultations. That's why, in one of our recommendations, we talk about the need for engagement with aboriginal peoples within various indigenous groups, and that should take place as part of the development of the national labour force strategy, as well as the national transportation supply chain strategy.

We knew that within 100 days we would be unable to do sufficient consultation and engagement. We recognized as well that aboriginal groups and northern and remote communities were very important parts of the transportation supply chain and that we needed as a country to be able to ensure—

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Yako. Unfortunately, Mr. Bachrach's time is up.

Next we will go to Mr. Strahl for five minutes, please.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Thank you very much.

I want to make sure I've captured something you've just said, Ms. Yako. You said that reliability is more important than competitiveness. What was the other thing you said there?

Ms. Louise Yako: I said that reliability is almost trumping efficiency and competitiveness, but they're all important.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Sure, and we've heard that in our study from the airline sector in particular, about the instability and reliability having an outsized impact on their operations, so it certainly follows with what we've heard.

I guess I should start as well by congratulating you on the comprehensive nature of your report. I've noted that Transport Canada has no shortage of excellent reports. The question becomes, does the government action flow from that? I hope we will hear from you as time goes on. I know you don't have a mandate, particularly, to follow it through, but I hope we will hear from you on what you're seeing both from the private sector and from government.

I wanted to talk a bit about rail. I wanted to focus in on rail. The CTA holds railroads accountable for providing adequate service. I've talked to shippers and have heard that the standard is difficult to enforce because it's so poorly defined.

Did you have any recommendations? Did you find that this was a problem in trying to determine how...? I know you talked very extensively about the relationship between shippers and the railways, but how do you think we can better define what providing adequate service is, so that there can be the reliability, predictability and stability that are needed for a smooth supply chain?

Mr. Jean Gattuso: Mr. Strahl, one thing in our recommendations is that we are putting more power into the CTA. We also list some criteria that need to be followed by the CTA in order to engage the railways. For sure, with that in their hands, we're beefing up their authority, so that should be quite helpful for the supply chain fluidity.

Mr. Mark Strahl: In terms of the CTA, I note that a key recommendation was to give them more power to be an arbiter of disputes, to cut the minister out of that and to make sure there was that accountability.

What did you hear, again, from both the railways and shippers and customers of the railway in terms...? I've certainly heard there are concerns about there being repercussions when remedies are sought from the CTA or from Transport Canada when service standards are not met, and that there could be implications down the line in terms of contracting and that sort of thing.

Did you hear that feedback from customers of the railway, that they were concerned that if they used the dispute resolution mechanisms at their disposal, they would actually be penalized in future contracts?

• (1710)

Ms. Louise Yako: Yes, we heard that.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Do you have a recommendation for how to prevent that from being an ongoing concern?

Ms. Louise Yako: As Jean said, one of the things we recommended was that the CTA be given greater authority and longer timelines for investigation, and we identified very specific data that we thought might be helpful.

At the same time, we recognize that there's a potential for unintended consequences. It is something that I think needs to be followed. As that recommendation is implemented, assuming it is implemented, it will need to be reviewed again to ensure that there is sufficient authority and there are sufficient data requirements.

I see Jean wants to say something here.

Mr. Jean Gattuso: I would add, for our discussion, that rail is also a North American activity. We spent a week in Washington, and we looked at some of the practices of the Surface Transportation Board. That's also in our report.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Thank you.

How much time do I have?

The Chair: You're at exactly five minutes and two seconds, Mr. Strahl. Thank you very much.

[Translation]

I will now go to Mr. Iacono.

Mr. Iacono, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Gattuso, to make the job easier for new drivers, what do you think about establishing less onerous requirements for issuing licences or certifications for commercial truck drivers who drive only short distances?

Mr. Jean Gattuso: I don't operate a transport company. You can read the results of our research in our report. We would agree with that recommendation ourselves if the industry thinks it would enable them to recruit more drivers. The objective is to hire more drivers in order to offer more services. I would be in favour of that recommendation, but I would want to get the opinion of the industry stakeholders about it.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

You said earlier that we need more immigrants. Knowing that Quebec is pulling the rug out from under us by significantly limiting the number of immigrants it accepts, how can we address the labour shortage?

Mr. Jean Gattuso: I won't answer on behalf of Quebec; I am not its premier.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I'm asking you the question because you are very familiar with Quebec. You are a Quebecker, you speak French very well, so you are well aware of the situation that Canada, Quebec and the other provinces are in. I'm asking you this question so you can give us some guidance.

Mr. Jean Gattuso: My parents arrived from Italy, as did yours, I assume. They were hired by Canadian Pacific. They disembarked at Ellis Island, in New York City.

I won't take a position regarding Quebec. The government has its policies. I am not in the government. I think we need immigrants to continue growing the country and to be a major player in the world. As we said when we began our presentation, trade represents 61% of Canada's GDP. If we don't have people to do the work, we will not be recognized as good suppliers by our customers at home and abroad.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: You know that training and skills development are traditionally under provincial jurisdiction, although the federal government has played a much more proactive role recently.

How important is it for the different levels of government and the provinces to work together to address labour shortages in the transportation sector?

Have you observed that the governments do not work together as well as they could? If so, can you tell us more about that?

Mr. Jean Gattuso: If the governments worked together well, there would undoubtedly be no labour shortage.

The governments have to look at the labour shortage as a national problem. It isn't solely a provincial problem. We have to find ways together to ensure Canada's prosperity and the efficiency of the supply chain.

• (1715)

Mr. Angelo Iacono: How long do you think there has been a labour shortage?

Mr. Jean Gattuso: The labour shortage started to be felt in 2015. The demographic curves have shown the aging of the population since 1997. Looking at those curves, we could have predicted that it was coming and understood that immigration would not be sufficient to solve the shortage. We could also have looked at the figures on Canada's economic growth in 1997. There are things that could have been predicted based on that.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Mr. Gattuso, I see that you are very conversant with this issue. We are not asking you to engage in politicking, but as a witness on the outside, you have a very clear understanding of the problem.

Our objective is to listen to witnesses like you and write a report at the end of our study. What can you recommend to us? You have mentioned a few things. Are there other aspects that have not been addressed to which you would like to draw our attention, to provide guidance for our work?

[English]

Is there a rabbit in the hat?

Mr. Jean Gattuso: We spent 100 days thinking about solutions, and labour was a major issue. We spoke with different stakeholders. We need to get and train immigrants in the short term. We can talk about automation, but right now, in the short term, we need immigrants and temporary workers, and we need to train them and find them places to stay.

That's what we should focus on.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Iacono and Mr. Gattuso.

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, the floor is yours. You have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The conversation we just heard was interesting. If I may, I am going to make a few comments, although I only have two and a half minutes.

First, I want to say that my wife is from an immigrant background and one of my children belongs to a visible minority. I completely recognize the contribution that immigration makes. However, Quebec must have control of its policies in order to ensure the survival of French. That is very important to the ability to transmit our culture. It is why I stand up for our public policies in Quebec and for our distinctiveness.

With that said, there is something the federal government could improve: the processing of immigration applications.

Did people tell you that the long processing times for immigration applications were a problem? I am talking about both tempo-

rary worker applications and other categories of workers. An employer can hire a worker and follow the process, but processing times may be so long that it discourages people. Employers are losing workers because of that.

Should the federal government be more efficient in how it processes immigration applications?

Mr. Jean Gattuso: Yes, especially in the case of applications by temporary workers who are needed for the harvest. The farmers we met with told us about the long processing times for those applications. So yes, the efficiency with which applications from workers in that sector are processed needs to be improved.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I am going to continue along the same line.

In the 1980s, people often said that immigrants were going to steal our jobs. Today, we tend to say the opposite, that we need immigrants to meet workforce needs.

A question arises, however. In the 1980s, the reply was that immigrants were not stealing anyone's job since they created their own jobs. Today, immigrants are still creating their own jobs, or at least additional demand.

What are we going to do, to solve the problem arising from our growing need to rely on immigration?

Mr. Jean Gattuso: We need skilled people, but we also need unskilled people we can train.

Take the agri-food sector. If a person works in the slaughterhouse at Olymel, for example, their skills in other areas are not being developed as well. That is an important factor to take into consideration. As I said, we need both skilled and unskilled people.

As I said earlier, 100 years ago when my grandfather and my father arrived from Italy, Canadian Pacific gave them a ticket and told them it was hiring Italians in Montreal to shovel snow. They were not asked...

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gattuso.

Unfortunately, time is up.

[English]

Next we have Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Bachrach, the floor is yours. You have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

One issue we saw during the pandemic in northwest B.C. was a number of sawmills curtailing their production because they couldn't find railcars to ship their product. I notice that the report talks about private sector entities working in a competitive environment not always creating outcomes that are in the national best interest.

In light of the recommendations around the CTA's playing a more proactive role, would that be a possible solution to instances where you have companies struggling to get transportation to get their product to market?

Ms. Louise Yako: We heard there was a lack of data visibility. Projections in terms of demand for transportation services are not as well known as they could and should be. That's something we've not talked to committee about.

I'm not sure I'm answering your question directly, Mr. Bachrach, but if we had better data visibility, so that we had improved transportation services demand projections, then that would give CTA ammunition, information, that it could use to help ensure that there were sufficient services, sufficient cars, for northwest B.C. companies.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: In reading through the report, the sense I take away is that the task force envisions a more proactive, interventionist role for the government and agencies like the CTA, to ensure that the supply chain as a whole is more efficient and delivers on the national interest.

Is that a fair characterization?

Ms. Louise Yako: What we envision is greater collaboration between government and the private sector and between levels of government and the private sector. It's that collaboration that would allow for greater reliability and efficiency of the supply chain, not government intervention necessarily. The government has an important role to play, obviously, but government is not going to solve this problem.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Yako.

Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

Next we have Mr. Jeneroux.

Mr. Jeneroux, the floor is yours. You have five minutes.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Under principle two in the report, you state, "Canada's transportation supply chain is made up of a network of companies...that are publicly traded, privately held and independently operated—often working in silos rather than as a cohesive system." You also state that "the transportation supply chain must begin to operate as a seamless, single entity."

What recommendations can you point to that ensure seamless operations?

Mr. Jean Gattuso: Before you go to seamless operations, when we're talking about the industry, the supply chain works in silos, and what's key is digitalization. Digitalization is key in order to share information. Even though there are publicly traded companies like that, we have to find a way for them to share information in order that everyone performs better, that the total supply chain performs better, rather than the need for each silo. That is also the thinking in the report. That's why collaboration is key.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Do you have anything to add, Ms. Yako?

By the same principle, the report states, "Without these, intervention may be required to ensure the transportation supply chain operates smoothly." This is on top of the supply chain office.

Can you confirm that you're not suggesting the nationalization of Canada's supply chain?

Ms. Louise Yako: We are not suggesting nationalization.

We said there should be voluntary co-operation and collaboration between the various parties—private sector entities and government. In the event that private sector entities do not want to share information that is necessary to understand how the supply chain is operating, that's when government may need to require that certain pieces of information be shared.

• (1725)

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: It didn't come up in the transcript, but I note, for those that are following along the transcripts, that you both shook your head vehemently "no" to the nationalization of the supply chain.

You talk about empowering the CTA to beef up its mandate and resources, but then you also talk about the supply chain office. Again, I have to highlight that the supply chain office has been, at least in my meetings, the point of contention from a number of stakeholders. Some think they like it, but I'd say quite a few are nervous about it.

You just have to look at other government agencies. CMHC comes to mind. It's kind of hit or miss if it's been successful or not, depending on what side of the table you're on at any given moment.

If that's the case, if you're beefing this up and then you're also creating this, just try to square with me how that helps to make things more streamlined and seamless.

Mr. Jean Gattuso: I'll go back to the supply chain office.

The supply chain office will pay for itself just to get back our trade share worldwide, especially with the U.S. I think you can look at gaining back three share points of our U.S. trade, which is a tremendous amount of money, and it won't cost billions of dollars.

Right now, not only is the supply chain office working in silo, but within the government, the different departments are sometimes not talking to each other, and each of them is involved in the supply chain.

Mr. Matt Jeneroux: Can I just interrupt you for a second, Mr. Gattuso?

I worry that with that logic, all departments will say, "Okay, the supply chain office has got it."

Is that your perception of what's going to happen? With my experience of the government, that's not what necessarily happens. Everybody fights for their piece of real estate.

Mr. Jean Gattuso: Everybody will continue to fight for their piece of real estate. The trick is to put KPIs that are oriented to supply chain in each department and report those KPIs. The supply chain office would be following them and making sure each department is also keeping track.

At the end of the day, it's only Canada's trade performance that will be key. If we want to have more programs to facilitate the lives of Canadians, we cannot permit more share of our trade business to be lost. It's as simple as that.

We are a country of 38 million in population. We need to grow. We're capable. If the Netherlands, with a population of 15 million, is capable of being an important player in world trade, we can do the same with Canada, but we need someone that is keeping track and making sure each department is also keeping track of their KPI in the supply chain.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gattuso.

[English]

Thank you very much, Mr. Jeneroux.

Finally, for our first panel, we have Mr. Badawey.

The floor is yours.

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairman, this is from the Emerson report from 2015. It says:

By 2060, an expected 350 percent increase in world trade will tilt in favour of the emerging economies, and their exports will become more specialized, entailing higher value-added activities. It will be important to anticipate the demands on our transportation sector and develop policies and infrastructure to support these trends.

With that, as part of the Emerson report, and taking into consideration the many reports we've completed that were identified earlier on, I have a question for the supply chain task force members. Do you feel we should be moving forward with a multimodal transportation labour strategy, including all methods of transportation, with a goal of strengthening our international trade performance? This would take into consideration the recommendations contained within the following studies: the Canadian Transportation Act review; the Emerson report; the "Interim Report on Establishing a Canadian Transportation and Logistics Strategy", which this committee completed in the past; the ports modernization review; the St. Lawrence Seaway review; the blue economy strategy; the supply chain study most recently completed by this committee; and the most recent final report of the national supply chain task force, 2022.

To get a bit more granular, I will give you an example. In Niagara we're embarking on a capital project—a Great Lakes innovation and training facility. The focus of this facility is going to be a campus that will be preparing and training the next generation of transportation specialists; integrating distribution and logistics and working hand in hand with the up-to-date movement of goods along strategic trade corridors, such as that on the Great Lakes; in-

tegrating with road, rail and air; and aligning with up-to-date data analysis leading to integrated management.

Therefore, is it fair to state that yesterday's drivers, engineers, captains and pilots, while moving goods, are tomorrow's transportation specialists— operators and data and logistics managers— trained to offer additional corporate and customer value through fluidity, and recognized as a skilled trade?

I pose that question to the two individuals specifically because it's 2022. With that said, and all of what I just mentioned, we're looking at the movement of goods, and those who are moving our goods, as being more than just drivers. They are, in fact, transportation specialists. They should be trained in that manner and recognized through a skilled trade. Would you agree?

Jean or Louise, go ahead.

• (1730)

Ms. Louise Yako: Yes. All those reports that you mentioned had very salient recommendations. Many of them still should be considered, because they're still in play.

Mr. Jean Gattuso: I'll add to that. In the report, when we put that we need also to have a supply chain labour strategy, that's exactly what we were thinking about. It's actually not only truck drivers, but everybody who is touched by logistics, because we need to push even further to recognize the logistics jobs in this country. It's part of the equation to become a better world trader.

Mr. Vance Badawey: On the next steps in your recommendation with respect to a supply chain office or an organization, can you give us some advice on how that can actually fit into what I just mentioned, with respect to facilitating not only the movement of trade but the folks who will actually be moving that trade, not just domestically but internationally?

Mr. Jean Gattuso: The key individuals you'll be choosing should also be very focused business people. You're going to need leaders who will also be capable of managing each department and pushing those trade objectives, because it's so depending on the future of Canada. At the end of the day, when you look at the importance that trade has on our GDP, besides the fact that we have plants and growers that are producing widgets, or grain or oil, you see that the key things are to serve the customer and to be competitive worldwide. If we're not competitive.... We're going to need strong leaders in the supply chain office to get this thing moving and to make sure that the supply chain office also has a group of business leaders who are looking at its performance.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Colleagues, this concludes the questioning for the first panel.

On behalf of members of this committee, I would like to thank our witnesses, Ms. Louise Yako and Monsieur Jean Gattuso, for their time and testimony today.

We will now suspend for five minutes as we prepare for the second panel.

This meeting is suspended.

• (1730) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1735)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

We will begin this second round with the opening remarks.

We will start with the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

The floor is now yours. You have five minutes.

Dr. Ian Gillespie (Director, Temporary Resident Policy and Programs, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thanks so much, Mr. Chair and committee members. My name is Ian Gillespie, and I'm director of temporary worker policy at IRCC.

I would like to begin by acknowledging that I am joining you from the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

As you know, Canada is facing labour shortages across the country and across sectors, including transportation. Immigration complements efforts to build domestic labour capacity and is an increasingly important contributor to Canada's prosperity and economic growth. Both temporary and permanent residents bring skills that our economy needs and help fill gaps in our labour force.

[Translation]

Economic immigration programs support a strong Canadian economy by attracting talent from around the world. Typically, economic immigrants are educated, able to integrate into the Canadian labour market with ease, and contribute to workplace diversity.

A range of programs ensure that all regions across Canada can realise the benefits of economic immigration. Selecting new permanent residents is a shared responsibility between the federal and provincial and territorial governments.

Through the provincial nominee program in particular, jurisdictions are able to prioritize the attraction and retention of newcomers with the skills most needed in each region.

• (1740)

[English]

A number of recent immigration measures are helping to meet Canada's labour market needs.

Last year IRCC introduced a time-limited temporary resident to permanent resident pathway to help retain the talent of over 90,000 essential workers and international graduates already living and working in Canada. They included workers in a range of transportation occupations, such as courier drivers, longshore workers and ramp attendants.

Changes to the national occupational classification that are coming into effect on November 16 will also enable foreign nationals working as truck drivers to now qualify for permanent residence through the skilled economic programs managed through IRCC's express entry system.

Canada welcomed over 405,000 permanent residents in 2021, a record number. The target for 2022 is just under 432,000, but as announced the other day, it will rise to 465,000 in 2023. In this way, permanent immigration helps address demographic and economic challenges over the long term.

Over the shorter term, Canada's temporary worker and international student programs play a significant role. They are demand-driven, with no caps or limits, so they can be flexible and responsive to the changing labour market landscape. They address the immediate workforce needs of diverse employers, provide a wide range of skill levels and educational attainment, and facilitate business productivity, growth and innovation.

For example, a new measure starting on November 15 will allow the more than 500,000 international students already in Canada to work more hours off campus, which will help to address labour shortages and allow them to earn more income to support their studies. IRCC also recently announced that international graduates with expiring post-graduation work permits will have the opportunity to work in Canada for an additional 18 months.

[Translation]

Last year, over 5,000 temporary foreign workers received work permits to fill specific job vacancies in transportation.

Almost two thirds came through the temporary foreign worker program, which is led by Employment and Social Development Canada.

[English]

Meanwhile, transportation jobs can also be filled through the international mobility program, which exempts employers from the requirements of the temporary foreign worker program when hiring foreign nationals whose work will create broader economic benefits for Canadians. This program facilitates access, for example, to foreign airline personnel and to railway maintenance workers. It also enables faster hiring of international technicians and professionals from countries with which Canada has trade agreements, including for occupations such as engineers, pilots and highly skilled mariners.

The IRCC processes work permits for foreign workers applying through both temporary worker programs. Since the beginning of the pandemic and to support the recovery of global supply chains, the IRCC has been prioritizing work permit applications for foreign truck drivers to fill critical needs in Canada's trucking industry.

While the initiatives I have mentioned will help over the longer term, employers face immediate needs for skilled foreign labour, which can be solved only by its timely entry.

As you're likely aware, demand for work permits has been rising, and this has contributed to a growing backlog and lengthening processing times. The IRCC is introducing a number of measures to address this issue, including hiring additional processing staff and exploring technology-based solutions, which are expected to move IRCC closer to meeting its service standards by the spring of 2023.

[Translation]

At the end of the day, immigration is only part of the solution, and a complement to domestic measures that my colleagues have mentioned to alleviate labour shortages in the transportation sector and elsewhere in Canada's economy.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Gillespie.

Next we have the Department of Employment and Social Development.

The floor is yours. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

[Translation]

Mr. Andrew Brown (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Skills and Employment Branch, Department of Employment and Social Development): Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members.

My name is Andrew Brown, and I am the senior assistant deputy minister for the skills and development branch at Employment and Social Development Canada.

I would like to note that I am joining you today from the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

I am pleased to be here to discuss labour shortages.

• (1745)

[English]

Labour market pressures are affecting practically all sectors of the economy in most regions of the country. As of July 2022 there were nearly a million job vacancies across Canada, which means twice as many occupations are now showing strong labour shortages compared to back in 2019.

For example, the trucking industry is a significant contributor to the national economy, with a GDP of \$20 billion in 2021, or about one-third of that for the entire transportation sector. The industry employs roughly 278,000 employees and has a vacancy rate of 9.4%, which is significantly higher than that of the labour market as a whole, at roughly 5.9%.

For truck drivers, this means roughly 28,000 unfilled positions, and this figure is in line with what we're hearing from the Canadian Trucking Alliance, which forecasts that the trucking industry will have a shortage of 55,000 workers at the end of 2023.

Demographic shifts that are rooted in aging populations and retirement are adding pressures by limiting available workers. As of August, occupations related to transportation had, on average, some of the highest-aged workers in the economy.

As the government looks to address labour shortages in Canada, we recognize that there are four potential avenues for increasing labour supply. One is supporting the transition of new entrants into the labour market, principally youth. The second is welcoming talent from around the world, more specifically immigrants and temporary foreign workers. The third is increasing the participation of groups that are under-represented in the labour market, and fourth is helping individuals already working who need some upskilling or re-skilling to adapt and stay in the labour force for longer, though to address labour shortages in the Canadian economy, it's going to be necessary to maximize all sources of labour in the short and longer term.

Youth are Canada's largest source of new entrants to labour markets. About 4.9 million young jobseekers are expected to enter the labour force between 2019 and 2028. To help youth and students build job skills and connect with employers, budget 2021 offered over \$720 million in additional funding for the youth employment and skills strategy, the student work placement program, and the Canada summer jobs program.

As you would have heard from my colleague, immigration is a source of new labour supply, and as a complement to permanent immigration, approximately 100,000 temporary foreign workers enter Canada every year. Recent changes allow employers to hire up to 30% of their workforce through the temporary foreign worker program for low-wage positions, for one year, in sectors that are experiencing significant shortages. Other employers are allowed to hire up to 20% of their workforce for low-wage positions until further notice, an increase from the former 10% cap for many employers.

Another source of labour supply is under-represented groups. Increasing the participation rate of women, indigenous people, persons with disabilities and Black and racialized Canadians in the workplace would significantly help to boost labour supply.

[Translation]

Equally as important to our labour market initiatives, the government's recent and ambitious investments in childcare, affordable housing, transportation, and broadband create the systems and supports needed to help increase Canadians' participation in the labour market.

Reducing skills mismatches and a better utilization of available talent will be critical to meet employment needs and shortages. To this end, the Government of Canada has taken concrete measures to help reduce shortages across the economy.

The sectoral workforce solutions program is one noteworthy example of recent investments through Budget 2021. That program, which provides \$960 million over three years, assists key sectors by funding industry-driven activities. That will assist workers through training and reskilling, and help employers attract and retain a skilled workforce.

Budget 2021 also made significant investments to...

• (1750)

[English]

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Brown. I'm sorry to cut you off. Could you wrap it up?

[Translation]

Mr. Andrew Brown: Right.

These were significant investments to establish a new apprenticeship service. The government also prioritized funding for foundational skills programs.

To conclude, I will simply say that we will continue working collaboratively with our federal partners and counterparts in provincial and territorial governments to help alleviate current and future labour market pressures.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brown.

I will now give the floor to Ms. Vanstone for five minutes.

Ms. Melanie Vanstone (Director General, Multi-Modal and Road Safety Programs, Department of Transport): Thank you.

[English]

Good evening, Mr. Chair and committee members.

I would like to begin by acknowledging that I'm joining you today from the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

I'm Melanie Vanstone, director general of multimodal and road safety programs at Transport Canada. Thank you for having me here today to share Transport Canada's perspectives on the acute labour and skills shortages facing the transportation sector, including in occupations such as truckers, mariners, pilots and rail workers.

A robust, diverse and future skilled transportation workforce is an enabler of Canada's economic recovery and an efficient supply chain, while also supporting the safety and security of our trans-

portation system. The transportation labour force supports the movement of goods and people for transportation-reliant sectors, including manufacturing, natural resources and agriculture across the country.

As other witnesses have expressed to this committee, there are a number of structural pressures that are contributing to labour and skill shortages in transportation. These include the high cost of education and training for some professions. It can cost up to \$90,000 to become a commercial pilot and more than \$15,000 to become a truck driver, coupled with low initial pay. Also, there is some lack of awareness of jobs and careers in the industry. As well, changing demographics and a lack of diversity in the industry are barriers. For example, transportation ranks below other regulated sectors in terms of diversity. Finally, in some cases, there's a poor image of the work culture across the industry due to work-life balance challenges, inadequate infrastructure and concerns about the sector's working culture.

Automation and other technologies will continue to change the industry going forward, meaning the nature of jobs in the industry will continue to evolve, emphasizing the need for increasingly advanced skills.

Recognizing the importance of labour to the functioning of the system, Transport Canada has developed a strategy to contribute to addressing labour and skills shortages. The strategy has four pillars, with an emphasis on the recruitment and retention of under-represented groups.

These pillars are, first, developing targeted research data and analysis; second, promoting awareness and outreach; third, addressing the high cost of training and other barriers by leveraging programs across government; and finally, modernizing approaches to regulations so these do not create unnecessary barriers.

The department continues to work closely with other federal departments and agencies, including those represented with me today, industry representatives and other levels of government.

Transport Canada has also been taking some direct actions in many areas.

For example, the marine training program was recently renewed in budget 2022 as part of the government's oceans protection plan to reduce barriers to marine training to under-represented groups in the marine labour force, such as women, northerners, Inuit and indigenous peoples.

The department has negotiated a number of reciprocal agreements to recognized certain foreign-issued certificates for seafarers in Canada. Currently, we have five agreements in place, with an additional three in ongoing negotiation.

TC is leveraging technology to modernize our certification processes and digitize our aviation pilot licensing system to better support the need for the industry to recruit and retain talent.

TC has engaged the Conference Board of Canada to produce a two-phased report to examine the economic impacts of transportation labour shortages on the Canadian economy.

We've also engaged Employment and Social Development Canada in several key programming areas. In particular, the sectoral workforce solutions program will invest \$960 million over three years to advance skills and training in seven different key economic sectors, including transportation.

Finally, I would note that in collaboration with the ESDC job bank, Transport Canada launched the transportation job and career pathway website to help promote careers in this sector.

Transport Canada and other departments are reviewing the specific recommendations in the national supply chain task force's final report. This includes those relating to labour and skill shortages. The task force's report will help inform the national supply chain strategy currently under development.

We recognize that continued collaboration is required with our federal partners, provinces and territories and industry to address labour and skill shortages in the transportation sector, including looking at the relevant recommendations from the task force.

• (1755)

[Translation]

Thank you for the time you have allowed us today.

[English]

I'd be happy to address any questions you may have relating to Transport Canada's role with labour and skill shortages in the sector.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Vanstone, for your opening remarks.

We will begin our round of questioning with Dr. Lewis.

Dr. Lewis, the floor is yours. You have six minutes.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Thank you so much.

My first question will be for Mr. Gillespie.

It's well known that there are backlogs in the processing of permanent residents, citizens and visa applications. We know that immigration has an important role to play in solving these labour shortage problems in Canada.

What is the state of the backlog of applications with respect to foreign visas and processing temporary foreign workers?

Mr. Jean-Marc Gionet (Director General, Immigration Program Guidance, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I'm happy to intervene on behalf of IRCC. I'll provide a bit of context here in terms of all the measures we are taking. You're

right, there is quite an inventory and backlog that we need to work through.

In addition to what Mr. Gillespie mentioned in the opening remarks, it's important to note the progress that is being made since we've doubled down on efforts to work through that inventory and those backlogs.

I have a few statistics to share with the committee. We finalized about 560,000 study permit applications in 2021, which was much higher than the prepandemic figures in 2019. So far in 2022, we've outpaced—

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Mr. Gionet, I'm sorry.

I heard there are 2.6 million applications in the backlog.

Is that correct? Can you confirm that?

Mr. Jean-Marc Gionet: I'll have to get back in terms of confirming the actual stats. I have a bit of a breakdown.

I can talk to you about the work permit applications, for example. We currently have an inventory of 316,000. I believe the figure for the temporary resident visas is around 800,000. Again, I don't have those statistics at my fingertips.

We would gladly provide those to the committee to support the study.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: What's the actual processing time for foreign worker applications, say, for example, in the transport section?

Mr. Jean-Marc Gionet: I have statistics in terms of processing times as of September for work permits. This is not specific to the transportation sector, but on work permits generally. As of September 2022, they stand at approximately 116 days.

As Mr. Gillespie mentioned, with the measures we're putting in place in terms of hiring additional staff and using the technology to find new and efficient ways to process, we're looking to return to service standards in the spring of 2023.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Have you placed a priority on the transportation sector, given the gravity of the situation?

Mr. Jean-Marc Gionet: Again, as I think my colleague, Mr. Gillespie, mentioned, there is a priority on truck drivers, for example. As you and this committee are no doubt aware, there is a high demand. As the program and pathway to apply for work permits has no cap and is unlimited, we've seen resurgence in the volume of applications across all lines of business.

We are quickly working to get back to service standards. From January to September of this year, we've issued approximately 552,000 work permits. When we compare that to last year, that figure was about 147,000 for that same period.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Do you have any numbers on how many employers actually start an LMIA process and then stop?

Mr. Jean-Marc Gionet: I believe I would have to defer to my colleagues from ESDC for that question.

• (1800)

Mr. Michael MacPhee (Assistant Deputy Minister, Temporary Foreign Workers Program, Department of Employment and Social Development): I don't have the specific numbers on that front. What I can say from an LMIA processing perspective is that last year we processed almost 70,000 labour market impact assessments for the temporary foreign worker program, and year to date we were at about 45,000 to 50,000. We are certainly seeing a year-over-year increase.

On the positive side on that front, in terms of processing times overall, we are processing those across all the different streams at 31 business days.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: How many do you have per year? In the year that you processed 70,000, how many applications did you have?

Mr. Michael MacPhee: We processed all of the applications that came in, so it was 68,000 applications received for a little over 100,000 positions.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Only 68,000 were received, and you processed them all. None were withdrawn or rejected.

Mr. Michael MacPhee: There is a portion of those that is rejected or not finalized because of a number of different factors, such as the fact that the employer doesn't meet all the obligations of the program.... We can certainly come back with additional details in terms of that breakdown.

Ms. Leslyn Lewis: Thank you. My next question is for Ms. Vanstone.

We heard on Monday that Transport Canada is turning away or failing to certify some foreign-trained, skilled personnel from certain fields, especially the aviation field.

Are you aware of AMEs who have skills in other countries, perhaps even work on Canadian planes, and are turned away at a 99% rate? Are you aware of that?

The Chair: Give a 15-second response, please.

Ms. Melanie Vanstone: I do not work in the aviation area of Transport Canada. In terms of AME licences, this number is not a correct number. This statistic represents only a small portion of AME applicants who have unapproved foreign basic training. Depending on where the applicants reside, that dictates where they can apply, so they may apply to different regions of Transport Canada. I would say—

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Vanstone. Unfortunately, we don't have any more time for that question.

Next we have Mr. Iacono.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Iacono, the floor is yours. You have six minutes.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank the witnesses for being with us this evening to provide guidance on how to solve the questions around the labour shortage.

Ms. Vanstone, the transportation sector has been hard hit by labour shortages, particularly in the rail and trucking industries.

As the Conference Board of Canada has noted, older workers are going to have to be relied on more in the transportation sector in order to address the situation.

Tell us what the main challenges are that must be met in order to encourage young people to consider a career in the transportation sector.

What do you think are the possible solutions?

[*English*]

Ms. Melanie Vanstone: I agree, and I appreciate the question.

We have been looking at Transport Canada, working with, of course, our colleagues at the federal level to look at ways to try to draw the attention of the transportation sector to young Canadians. It is fair to say that there is a lack of awareness of careers in the transportation sector or perhaps a misunderstanding of the skills and the range of transportation careers that are available.

We at Transport Canada have, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, created a website dedicated to helping people explore various careers in the transportation industry and to helping them identify where they would go for training for those careers. Over time, it is an area where we also may have opportunities to work with our colleagues from the industry to look at strategies to, in particular, try to appeal to young people to start off their careers in the transportation sector.

I'm not sure if my colleagues from Employment and Social Development Canada would like to speak in more detail about some of the youth programs that are run from that department.

• (1805)

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Yes, please go ahead, anybody else.

Mr. Andrew Brown: Sure.

I'm Andrew Brown with Employment and Social Development Canada.

I would add that we have a number of different sorts of training programs and supports. First, it starts with working with provinces and territories through supports that we provide them in the form of, very broadly, supports to train and upskill workers. It's really for provinces and territories to then determine what some of the priority areas are for investments within their own jurisdictions.

Second, we take a look at what sorts of programming the federal government can bring, as well, to support various sectors. I know my colleague from Transport Canada already mentioned it, but this new sectoral program that was introduced last year is one of the examples of where we're able to bring a focus to the transport sector and work to identify projects to support skills and employment programming that is targeted to workers and employers in the transportation sector.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

For the next questions, I will refer to the report of the supply chain task force and the recommendations that were made.

According to one of the recommendations made, expanding the temporary foreign worker program, as it applies to workers in the transportation supply chain, and expediting refugee and immigration processing for individuals who would be eligible to work for transportation supply chain-related businesses, are urgently needed.

How possible is it to pursue that route, given the current backlogs in processing immigration applications?

What should be done to achieve those objectives, Ms. Vanstone?

[English]

Ms. Melanie Vanstone: Transport Canada is taking a number of actions related to addressing labour shortages in the transportation sector. As I said, we're working very closely with our federal colleagues. We have been doing work to address regulatory barriers under our own department to ensure that they are not posing unnecessary barriers to entry into transportation careers, while also ensuring that safety and security are preserved.

Of course, we continue to engage closely to ensure that all federal programs in support of addressing labour shortages can be leveraged.

[Translation]

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

My next question is for Mr. Brown.

Still referring to the report, it recommends supporting businesses, community agencies, settlement agencies, and other organizations that can help temporary foreign workers, like refugees and immigrants, acclimate to Canadian work and social environments.

What programs currently exist to support this type of work?

If there are none, how possible is it to put such programs in place?

The Chair: Please give a short answer, Mr. Brown.

[English]

Mr. Andrew Brown: I will say that one of the things we work on in ESDC is programs such as the skills for success program, which funds projects to develop and deliver skills training and assessment resources to help Canadians—including permanent residents and refugees—to improve their foundational and transferrable skills. This is to help them prepare for and get ready to enter the job market. That's a way we start even earlier on to get people ready to enter the job market.

We're also looking at the sorts of wraparound supports that can be provided to workers. Again, this is to enable them to get into the workforce and, perhaps, subsequently further upskill and re-skill to move on to other jobs.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Brown.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, the floor is yours. You have six minutes.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would first like to welcome you, Mr. Gionet and Mr. Gillespie. I am very pleased to see you here. I do not have the good fortune to sit on the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, but I hear about concerns relating to your work on a daily basis at my constituency office.

I can tell you that one of my staff works almost full-time handling immigration cases. I find that situation to be odd, since we work in an MP's office and not an immigration office. However, there are people calling us constantly, people who are crying and discouraged. Their cases have not been processed for years and they no longer know what to do. We try to help them, but we can't do immigration employees' job.

Do you acknowledge the problem you have on your hands, that cases are not being processed fast enough?

• (1810)

Mr. Jean-Marc Gionet: Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair.

We do acknowledge that there are backlogs. An action plan has been adopted to try to reduce the backlogs and get back to the service standards provided.

As we said earlier, a bundle of measures have been put in place, including recruiting new employees to support us in processing files. We anticipate that by the end of the fall, 1,250 new employees will have been hired to help us reduce the backlogs. We are seeing progress in processing applications for student permits, work permits, visas, and permanent residence. The backlogs are starting to shrink.

I think it is worth pointing out to committee members that since the beginning of the year, 552,000 work permits have been issued.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: When you say there are improvements in processing times, I think that is good news. I'm listening to you and I can't deny that it's positive. However, I would like a clarification. When you talk about average time, approximately how much time are you talking about? People are calling us because their file has been in that backlog for years.

What is the normal processing time for a file?

Mr. Jean-Marc Gionet: Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair.

It really depends on the type. I can provide the committee with statistics on processing times in the various categories.

For permanent residence, it depends on the immigration levels set, as the minister said earlier this week. We have to make sure that we process the files and that the number of applications is consistent with what we are capable of processing. However, for a program like work permits, there is no limit. We are preparing to process applications as we receive them. As I said, at the end of September, processing time for work permits was 116 days.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Could you tell us whether processing times for applications submitted in French are comparable to processing times for applications submitted in English? Are the figures the same?

Mr. Jean-Marc Gionet: I don't think I have that level of detail, but I can check whether data is available regarding the language in which the application is submitted.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: If you could provide us with that information, we would be very grateful.

You said you had a plan for reducing the backlogs. I am pleased to learn that and I would like to hear more about this subject. What is your plan for reducing the backlogs? We are talking about backlogs of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of files. When you have that many files, how do you proceed? I imagine it isn't done by magic.

Mr. Jean-Marc Gionet: Thank you for the question, Mr. Chair.

Once again, it is hard to give general answers, given the range of programs we offer. However, I will give you some examples. Mr. Gillespie talked about the post-graduation work permit program.

- (1815)

Very recently, using technological tools, we put in place a renewal, an extension of work permits to take into account the processing times for permanent residence. So we are trying to find new ways of processing cases by modifying the processes. However, we will not be able to do that for all applications. So it is important to make sure that we staff the positions with officers who are able to make decisions, to help us get back to the desired processing times.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you for your answer.

This time I will be addressing Mr. Brown, Mr. MacPhee and Mr. Hickey.

In addition to immigration cases, there are also all the businesses that contact us complaining about the processing times for temporary foreign workers. There seem to be blockages everywhere in the federal system. The temporary foreign workers come back every year, and it is difficult to understand why this problem has not been solved. The people have to come back every year to work in the fields. They are seasonal workers. However, there are also requests for temporary foreign workers in other industries. Still, the situation never improves, and even gets worse.

How is it that the situation is not improving?

The Chair: Unfortunately, we will have to wait until the next round of questions for the answer, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[English]

Next we have Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Bachrach, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Brown, you mentioned that one of the areas that has potential for bringing people into the transport sector labour market is groups who are currently under-represented, including indigenous people. Now, there's a whole suite of different barriers that indigenous folks in northwest B.C. face to accessing the labour market, one of which is their lack of a driver's licence. There's a woman named Lucy Seger from All Nation Driving Academy who has done some excellent research on the barriers to driver licensing for indigenous people in British Columbia. A lot of the trends probably apply across Canada. I wonder if you're aware of this work and, if so, what you see as the role of the federal government in reducing barriers to driver licensing for indigenous entrants to the labour market.

Mr. Andrew Brown: One of the things you have touched upon there is the desire to get under-represented groups into the labour market, and here, specifically, we're thinking about into the transportation sector. Certainly, for us, indigenous people across the country would be one of those priority areas. We're looking at and already working with indigenous groups to improve our skills and employment training.

With respect to the specific study that you're referring to and the challenges with respect to obtaining driver's licences, I'm not aware of the specifics there. However, some of our programming is directed towards preparing people to get ready for the labour market, so there may be opportunities for work there. Certainly, through a number of programs we're continuing to bring and build in a focus on further inclusion—for indigenous groups as well as others represented in the labour market—and wraparound supports. This includes looking at the other things people may need to help them participate in the labour market.

There's ongoing work there, and certainly we would be interested in knowing more about the barriers that are being faced in indigenous communities.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Brown.

Perhaps we can have Ms. Seger table a brief with the committee that could be considered as part of this report, because I think it would be very relevant.

My next question is for Ms. Vanstone. You mentioned marine training. I was in Prince Rupert this past weekend. Prince Rupert has seen a real expansion of employment in the marine sector, largely due to the expansion of the port of Prince Rupert, but due to other activities surrounding that as well.

One thing I heard about from people in the community, from unions and from other groups, was the need for a local marine training facility. Currently, people who want to access these jobs have to travel all the way to the Lower Mainland for training at their own expense, which takes them away from their family and home.

I wonder whether your department has thought about the addition of regional marine training centres, and whether the B.C. north coast would be on the list as a candidate for one of those.

• (1820)

Ms. Melanie Vanstone: With respect to training, of course, it's important to understand that this is primarily a provincial jurisdiction. As part of the federal government, we work very closely, of course, and engage at various levels with the provinces around training.

From the perspective of Transport Canada, we are interested in engaging in more detailed conversations with our provincial counterparts to look at these kinds of questions, to ensure that we are doing what we can to have adequate training to meet the needs of the transportation sector. I think what has been raised here about the training being in particular areas is a very interesting question, and it is one that would be good for further conversation with our provincial and territorial counterparts.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Do I have more time, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: Mr. Bachrach, you will be glad to hear you have one and a half minutes.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: That's fabulous. Look at that—I'm getting more efficient. I think that's what's happening here. Efficiency, of course, allows us to be more productive.

My next question is around the temporary foreign worker program. Mr. Gillespie, you talked about how the government is working to expedite and provide express entry for foreign nationals employed as truck drivers.

This seems like a really positive move, certainly in line with what the NDP supports in terms of moving away from the temporary foreign worker program towards providing status for all foreign nationals who are working in our country and contributing to our economy.

Why would we limit it to the trucking sector? There are so many sectors of our economy that are in need of additional labour. What are the barriers to expanding this express entry to other sectors, either within transport or elsewhere throughout the economy?

Dr. Ian Gillespie: In this instance what's happening is that the national occupational classification system that we and ESDC rely on to administer both temporary worker programming and permanent resident programming is moving to the next iteration, the most updated iteration for it, NOC 2021. As it does this, the classifications are shifting. In particular, the truck driver occupation that I mentioned is shifting to be deemed a higher-skilled occupation.

The IRCC permanent residence programs governed under the express entry system aren't changing. It's simply that the occupations themselves are shifting around. The occupational classification system has over 500 occupations, and a number of others are being bumped up to become considered higher-skilled occupations.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Gillespie and Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Muys, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. Dan Muys (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for your time this afternoon.

I want to pick up on the questions from Dr. Lewis and Monsieur Barsalou-Duval with regard to the backlog.

We heard earlier in today's meeting from the national supply chain task force. One thing they talked about was the need for workers. They pointed to immigration and to temporary foreign workers as part of that solution. We also heard that from many witnesses throughout the course of this study.

You know, you can't confirm that there is a 2.6-million case backlog, and the processing time seems to vary, or it depends. There are lots of stats out there. I've heard 160 days and I've heard six months. What is the service standard in terms of processing applications at IRCC?

Mr. Jean-Marc Gionet: At the risk of repeating myself, it depends on the line of business. We've listed service standards for a number of categories. They range from 60 days to six months to 120 days. It really depends on the business line.

I think they're all available on the website, but we'd be happy to table that—

Mr. Dan Muys: Are you achieving those service standards currently?

Mr. Jean-Marc Gionet: No, and that is.... For example, again, to focus on the work permit, which I think has been key to this conversation and this study, the service standard there is 60 days. As I mentioned, as of September we're at 116 days, but the measures we are taking in terms of staffing up and looking at efficiencies are with a view to returning to that service standard early in 2023.

• (1825)

Mr. Dan Muys: Is the department working at full capacity at the moment, and/or has it been over the last couple of years?

Mr. Jean-Marc Gionet: At full capacity....

Mr. Dan Muys: That's in terms of staffing and the ability to process applications.

Mr. Jean-Marc Gionet: The pandemic certainly impacted the ability for certain offices to operate as they had done prepandemic, but certainly in recent months things are getting back to normal. For example, visa application centres overseas are operational. We took steps to—

Mr. Dan Muys: Everyone's back at work. Let me ask the question that Monsieur Barsalou-Duval asked but ran out of time for. How are things not improving?

Mr. Jean-Marc Gionet: Again, I think there is improvement. We're not, for example, back at the 60-day work permit target, but we are producing record numbers of work permit applications compared with recent statistics. That is being achieved through the measures I've mentioned—staffing, looking at the efficiencies, leveraging the technology and making sure we have online applications and can move files around.

Progress is being achieved, but it's not going to be an overnight fix to get back to 60 days as we—

Mr. Dan Muys: It's not an overnight fix. How do we up the urgency? What can the federal government or the department do to increase and expedite those applications? Again, we heard from every witness so far in this study, over the course of six meetings, that this really needs to be ramped up. What do we do? What can be done to ramp that up quickly?

Mr. Jean-Marc Gionet: Again, it's the investments that I've mentioned we're making in terms of looking at the processes, streamlining and hiring staff. As the minister announced, the permanent resident levels are going up. That means we can land additional permanent residents year over year. That will help in ensuring that there are employees and workers who are selected by the provinces, for example, to meet those labour market demands.

Mr. Dan Muys: Let me go to Transport Canada. We've heard over the course of this study that we're short 28,000 to 30,000 truck drivers. We'll be short 58,000 employees in the air sector over the course of the next decade. I think it was 50,000 in the marine sector or the rail sector as well. These are startling numbers.

Is Transport Canada concerned about this labour shortage and the growing gap?

The Chair: Give a 15-second response, please.

Ms. Melanie Vanstone: Yes, we are. That's why we put in place the four-point strategy I mentioned in my opening remarks, and we intend to work very closely with our federal counterparts, provinces and territories—

Mr. Dan Muys: Is enough being done? I mean, a website and reviewing recommendations are not really much action.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Muys, and thank you, Ms. Vanstone.

Last today, we have Mr. Badawey for five minutes.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just want to tell Mr. Bachrach to come on down to Niagara. We're building that kind of facility, and it's going to be an innovation in training facilities.

• (1830)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Is it portable?

Mr. Vance Badawey: No, it's not portable, but they would love Niagara. They can come down and enjoy the falls, enjoy the wineries—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Vance Badawey: —the beaches and all that, and, of course, they can go right next door to Leslyn's area in Haldimand, which is a beautiful area.

Anyway, now that I've wasted 10 or 15 seconds, I want to expand on my earlier questions to these individuals who we have on the screen.

I'll say this. The preface to my question is the fact that yesterday's drivers and operators are today's transportation specialists. No longer is someone just driving a truck or captaining and piloting a

marine vessel and so on and so forth. They look after, through efficiencies and effectiveness, real-time decision-making. Whether it's the product, the cargo they're carrying or the data they're managing en route, they give companies and customers more effectiveness, more fairness and, with that, more efficiencies.

Is it fair to say that yesterday's drivers—and I'm going to repeat the question I put earlier—engineers, captains and pilots, while moving goods, are tomorrow's transportation specialists? They are operators, yes, but equally important are their data and logistics managers, who are trained to offer additional corporate and customer value, as I mentioned earlier.

Do you feel that, with the trade agreements our nation has ratified within the last three to four years...? Yes, our population is 38 million people, and some would think that's small, but frankly, our economic population is over 1.8 billion, which places us within the top two economic populations in the world. Therefore, do we integrate?

Someone mentioned it earlier; I think it was Mr. Gillespie. Do we integrate, within this group of trading partners, distribution logistics and data analysis, leading to integrated transportation management and therefore up-to-date transportation specialists, not just drivers but transportation specialists who are therefore trained in that manner?

I'll throw that question out to all of you.

Ms. Melanie Vanstone: I'll start off, and I'll invite my colleagues to join.

From the perspective of Transport Canada, we see that there is constant introduction of new technologies and change in the transportation sector, which drive changes in the skill requirements for many different occupations in that sector. I believe, to some extent, that the statement rings true. There's an ongoing evolution of skills and requirements for people to participate in these careers.

Also, I would mention that Transport Canada has made some investments already through budget 2022, with \$163.3 million being invested over five years to develop a modern, digital, analytics-driven approach to support supply chain optimization, improve asset and traffic management, foster resiliency and improve coordination across the modes of transportation. We are, I think, recognizing these issues and taking steps in that broader context.

I welcome any others who would like to add to that response.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Are there any other comments?

Mr. Andrew Brown: I would just say that we recognize that the sectors themselves are well placed to speak to what some of the needs are. That's one of the reasons we're complementing some of the broader programs that we have with the sectoral workforce solutions program. This is something that is going to be funding sectoral projects, and it will really help employers and workers in particular sectors.

We've gone out with a call for proposals. This is currently in the assessment process, so we're going to have to see which proposals will be funded, but we hope we're going to be able to announce in the coming months projects that will be specific for and led by people in particular sectors, such as the transportation sector.

This would be a way to leverage some of the expertise that's within different parts of the transportation sector in terms of informing skills and employment programming.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Brown, and thank you, Mr. Badawey.

That concludes the questioning for today. On behalf of all committee members, I want to thank our witnesses for their time and for sharing their expertise with us.

The meeting is adjourned.

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