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Chair: The Honourable Judy A. Sgro





## Standing Committee on International Trade

Tuesday, October 4, 2022

• (1100)

[English]

**The Chair (Hon. Judy A. Sgro (Humber River—Black Creek, Lib.)):** I call the meeting to order.

This is meeting number 28 of the Standing Committee on International Trade. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room, and remotely using the Zoom application.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and members, which I have to repeat every single meeting.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking.

With regard to interpretation, for those on Zoom, you have the choice at the bottom of your screen of floor, English, or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select your desired channel.

As a reminder, all comments should be addressed through the chair. For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the "raise hand" function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can, and we appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard. Should any technical challenges arise, please advise me. We will suspend for a few minutes to ensure that all members can participate fully.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on June 6, 2022, the committee is beginning its study on potential impacts of the ArriveCAN application on certain Canadian sectors.

We have with us today Zain Chagla, as an individual, by video conference. From the Canadian Airports Council, we have Monette Pasher, president. From the City of Niagara Falls, we have Mayor Jim Diodati. From the Tourism Industry Association of Canada, we have Beth Potter, president and chief executive officer. Finally, from the Vancouver Airport Authority, we have Trevor Boudreau, manager of government relations.

Welcome to you all, and thank you very much for taking time out of your busy schedules to join us in person and by video conference.

Dr. Chagla, I invite you to make an opening statement of up to five minutes, please.

**Dr. Zain Chagla (As an Individual):** Hello, everyone, and good morning. Thanks for allowing me to appear as a witness for the Standing Committee on International Trade's study of the potential impacts of the ArriveCAN application on certain Canadian sectors.

My name is Zain Chagla. I'm an infectious disease physician, medical director of infection control at St. Joseph's and an associate professor at McMaster University, both in Hamilton, Ontario.

Throughout the pandemic, I've worked with COVID-19 infection control, vaccinations, therapeutics, local epidemiology, clinical trials and public education. I'm a frontline physician and still see up to 50 patients a week with COVID-19 to offer them early therapy.

Today's meeting focuses on the impact of ArriveCAN. My focus today is not on the application per se, but why the measures instilled in ArriveCAN were needed and when the need for them started to decrease. This is important because the need for the application was predicated on the need for certain travel measures throughout the pandemic.

Canada has used several travel measures, including pre- and post-arrival testing, quarantine of various groups and proof of vaccination when vaccinations became available. At the beginning of the pandemic, it was increasingly apparent that international travel was leading to ongoing transmission within Canada, whether it was through international flights or the land border with the United States. In the first year of the pandemic, with fairly limited options to reduce transmission, the subsequent health care utilization and the background of ongoing local restrictions to limit transmission, the use of these travel measures did make sense. However, following the introduction of vaccinations, the data suggested a marked reduction in transmission and infection and a significant decrease in severe complications in vaccinated individuals, marking a time when the long-term sustainability of vaccinations and eventual therapeutics may have led to a rethink of pandemic measures.

Particularly when omicron emerged, many things changed. Vaccination efficacy still remained quite high with severe disease, but with two doses it decreased significantly. Data from Ontario suggested very limited protection 20-plus weeks after the vaccine dose was administered, which really impacted the use of the proof of vaccination policy to limit transmission associated with travel. One could argue that such a mandate was important to reduce severe disease in travellers, as the vaccines still remain an important measure for that, but we know that the distribution of severe disease is uneven. An unvaccinated 12-year-old still presents a significantly lower risk of hospitalization than a fully vaccinated 80-year-old with available boosters.

Adding to this, the use of quarantine and border measures was also challenged. PCR testing, which was used earlier in the pandemic, is expensive and carries the risk of identifying low-risk or asymptomatic individuals with a prior infection, as they may shed non-viable virus for weeks and even months after infection. This became magnified in the era of omicron, particularly when many provinces limited access to PCR testing for the general public. Many individuals may not have been able to document their prior infection with a PCR test, thereby increasing the risk that an individual identified for random testing will test positive and have to undergo quarantine while posing no threat to the local community.

The use of random testing for variants was important as a secondary benefit, but there were other methods of surveillance, with the ability to do local surveillance and sequencing to improve our variant maps across the country. There was also global data sharing, which allowed for many countries to share data transparently, underlying again the collaboration that allowed us to examine variants of concern without using the international border as a method to do that. The reality is that all variants of concern eventually did reach Canada, with the omicron subvariants currently circulating.

Finally, the use of quarantine in asymptomatic individuals in the omicron era in the context of wide-scale community transmission was really of limited community benefit, recognizing that chains of transmissions were far more likely to occur domestically than they were with international travel or travel over an international border. The lack of benefit was also magnified over the land border, where shorter and same-day travel with personal vehicles coming from a single country with very transparent access to variant data lowered the rationale for employing these measures at the land border.

• (1105)

A modelling study by IATA looked at what the impact of testing and quarantine measures would be in a number of different scenarios, such as an omicron emergence or a vaccine emergence. Across a number of different modelling scenarios, they saw a delay in the peak of infections of two to four days, with largely the same peak of infections noted in local communities. So yes, these measures, if instituted appropriately and at 100%, may work, but all they may do is delay the peak—not necessarily delay the number of infections but delay when they occur and—

• (1110)

**The Chair:** Dr. Chagla, I'm sorry, but the time is up and we must move on.

**Dr. Zain Chagla:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for that information.

Ms. Pasher, you have up to five minutes, please.

**Ms. Monette Pasher (President, Canadian Airports Council):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good day, committee members. My name is Monette Pasher. I'm the president of the Canadian Airports Council. I'm pleased to appear before you today on behalf of our members, Canada's airports, to speak to your study on the impacts of the ArriveCAN app.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge that I join you today on the unceded territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin nation.

Like so many sectors, we are focused on learning lessons from the pandemic and leveraging tools to support more efficient travel. Part of that means finding ways to innovate and to create a streamlined process for passengers in Canada's airports as we see the return to travel. Canada's airports have long advocated for tools that create efficiencies at our border without compromising the integrity of our national security. Over our history, the airport sector has welcomed measures like border pre-clearance agreements and the NEXUS program, which have helped streamline the travel experience for passengers. We know that achieving greater efficiencies with border processing means deploying new technology solutions.

From the perspective of our members, digital tools must be the cornerstone of the future of air travel. To that end, ArriveCAN can be part of the solution rather than the problem, but only if it's used correctly. It is important to distinguish between the application itself and its use to manage the impacts of the pandemic. Now with the inclusion of the advance declaration within ArriveCAN, we have taken the first step down the path of using technology to support low-risk travellers.

Many of you have heard publicly from our members over the last several months that our sector had been advocating for all COVID-19 health checks and testing to be removed, as visitors were choosing not to come to Canada because of potentially being required to quarantine for 14 days. As of Saturday, these policies have officially changed, which we very much welcome and appreciate, but fusing public health checks with the customs process has unfortunately shrouded the true benefits that this technology can deliver to both our passengers and our airports.

When used to allow passengers to accomplish in advance via the application what they had traditionally been required to do at a kiosk in our airports, this tool presents a tremendous opportunity. There are notable benefits to moving away from using ArriveCAN for public health checks and toward using it as a tool to streamline existing border processes, which, it must be noted, was the intended purpose behind creating the platform in the first place.

Passengers can now complete their advance declaration using ArriveCAN up to 72 hours in advance at some of our airports. For travellers, this cuts down total processing time by more than half. That is quantifiable. It's a measurable improvement in processing times. That feature benefits travellers who choose to use the platform, but it also shrinks wait times for all travellers in line, whether they choose to use the app or the traditional route. It helps get everyone to their destination more quickly.

Our borders are essential to both our safety and our security. Getting travellers across boundaries more quickly does not require sacrificing either one. It simply requires us to use our resources practically and correctly to offer new and more sophisticated ways of accomplishing the same goals. Technology is key to that.

We ask our government leaders and our stakeholder partners to remain focused on working collaboratively with us so that we can deploy and implement those important tools. Rather than disregarding ArriveCAN, we should take stock of how it can be used best.

The result from the advance declaration function proves the value of doing just that. Now we need the legislative and regulatory authority under the Customs Act to fully modernize our border. We will continue to be a partner in making the right investments and decisions to help reduce processing times. It is what travellers expect.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to the discussion.

• (1115)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll move on to Mayor Diodati for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Jim Diodati (Mayor, City of Niagara Falls):** Thank you very much to the committee. I'll do my best not to repeat anything.

Niagara Falls is the number one leisure destination in Canada. We get upwards of 20 million visits per year, and 40,000 people count on tourism to feed their families, pay their mortgages and pay their bills. COVID has been devastating for us. Tourism is \$105-billion export industry in this country, and it's affected Niagara Falls as a tourist community to the tune of billions of dollars. I have submitted documentation from Niagara Falls Tourism, the Peace Bridge authority and the Niagara Parks Commission to further illustrate the impact that it's had on us here.

To illustrate to the group the number of people who come here, we get approximately 10 million crossings of our four international bridges. The majority of people who come into this country do so at land border crossings, and oftentimes it's what we refer to as the "rubber tire market"—people impulsively making a decision to come to Niagara Falls.

The typical scenario is a family wakes up, the weather is nice and they make a decision at breakfast to drive to Niagara Falls. They get in the van, they get to the border and they're questioned about the ArriveCAN app, of course, and most of them have no idea what it's about. They're then asked to download it, and oftentimes they do not have roaming and most times do not have access to Wi-Fi at the border. Then our CBSA border guards, instead of worrying about drugs, guns and criminals, become administrators helping them download the app, with questionable outcomes.

I don't need to explain the glitchiness and problems we've experienced with it, but what happens? These people get very frustrated, and as we often say, when you have an experience that's good, you tell someone, and when it's bad, you tell 10 people. That's exactly what's been happening.

There has been a lot of negativity through the U.S. media and the word of mouth that's travelling throughout the United States, and now many people have decided to bypass Canada with their leisure dollars. Our bigger concern going forward is the long-term residual effect of the negativity around our borders. We're going to be looking for the federal and provincial governments to work together to help us fund a campaign to get the word out that we've removed these unnecessary requirements at our borders and once again are open for business. Our ultimate goal, of course, was always to be safe, and early on we supported all the border measures to keep our communities safe. As Dr. Zain Chagla illustrated, there came a point when it wasn't doing that any longer.

We were hopeful that at the beginning of the tourism season, these measures would be lifted so we would have a chance for a recovery. Typically, 50% of the revenue that comes into Niagara Falls comes from U.S. visitation. Americans typically stay longer and spend more, so the long-term effect of this requirement at the border has been devastating. Now, unfortunately, the tourism season is over and 80% of our revenue comes during the summer. Now we're in what's known as the shoulder season, and we'll be going into the holiday season. The tourism operators in Niagara Falls need to make enough revenue during the summer to carry them through the shoulder season and through the winter until the next season is upon us.

We were very hopeful that tourism would return this year. The good news is that domestic tourism returned to prepandemic levels and beyond, so clearly people were ready to return, but unfortunately U.S. visitation was approximately half of prepandemic numbers. We point our fingers squarely at the border measures, including the ArriveCAN app.

We have a lot of businesses right now that are trying to figure out how they're going to pay their bills going into the shoulder season. We're grateful, first of all, that it's been removed, and we're hopeful that the federal government will work with the provinces to help us come up with an advertising campaign. I've suggested a grand re-opening of Canada right here in Niagara Falls with the Prime Minister and the premier so we can let the Americans know that once again we are open for business.

That's all I have at this time. Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mayor Diodati.

Ms. Potter, please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Beth Potter (President and Chief Executive Officer, Tourism Industry Association of Canada):** Madam Chair and members of the committee, I would like to thank you for inviting me here today.

My name is Beth Potter and I am the president and CEO of the Tourism Industry Association of Canada. I will be presenting my remarks in English, but I will be happy to answer your questions in French during the question period.

• (1120)

[*English*]

Before I give my remarks, I acknowledge that we are gathered here today on the unceded and unsundered territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin nation.

TIAC is the national advocate for tourism in Canada. Acting on behalf of thousands of businesses across the country, our work involves promoting policies, programs and other initiatives that foster the growth of the sector.

Tourism matters. It enables socio-economic development, job creation and poverty reduction. This in turn drives prosperity and has a significant positive social impact, providing unique opportunities to women, minorities and young people. The benefits of travel and tourism spread far beyond the direct GDP impact and employment, with indirect gains extending through the entire travel ecosystem and supply chains to other sectors. I will highlight also that tourism plays an important role as head ambassador on the global stage in sharing Canada's values and principles, and is a crucial vehicle for fostering social cohesion.

As I shared with you during my last appearance, the multitude of restrictions that were put in place during the pandemic to keep Canadians safe, including border closures and lockdowns, had a devastating impact on the tourism industry. I also shared with you that as our hard work to recover from the pandemic continues, we now face new challenges, such as disruptions in supply chains, inflation at a 40-year high, rising interest rates and a severe labour shortage, to name a few.

We are still a very long way from recovering Canada's travel economy to its former glory. The latest forecast estimates that total tourism spending in Canada is now tracking to return to pre-pandemic levels by 2025. In fact, those estimates forecast that total spending levels from both domestic and international sources will

reach \$80 billion by the end of this December. That's 24% lower than our pre-pandemic high-water mark. Domestic spending is expected to recover much quicker than spending in the international market, but it's still down 16%, and international spending is down 53% compared with 2019.

The international market is important to consider and actively promote. This is because foreign tourists tend to travel longer when they come to Canada and tend to spend more per trip.

When I last spoke with you, we were hopeful to see a significant resurgence in tourism this summer. We know that people want to travel and we know there is considerable pent-up demand to get out there and experience all that Canada has to offer. I'm pleased to share with you that this summer season has certainly been better than the last two years, and there is hope for optimism.

We are particularly grateful for Minister Boissonnault's leadership in launching the important process of updating Canada's tourism growth strategy. This initiative is intended to result in a comprehensive action plan to help the Canadian tourism industry rebuild from the impact of the pandemic and best position it for future growth and success.

In our submission, which we tabled in early August, we outlined key priorities to help the tourism sector build forward to be the economic powerhouse that it once was. We recommended that a number of key targets be achieved by 2030. These relate to tourism spending, dispersion, workforce, international overnight visitors and our global competitive position.

Critical to the success of the new federal strategy is, as we also highlighted, the need for all tourism partners across the whole of government to work towards the same goals. In this regard, we recommended the creation of a tourism policy council of ministers, led by the Minister of Tourism, to ensure that tourism is prioritized across federal departments and that decision-making is aligned. We also identified four key pillars that would best underpin the new strategy: attract and retain a sustainable tourism workforce, improve access for visitors to and within Canada, develop and promote tourism assets, and build a regenerative and inclusive tourism industry.

We emphasize that tourism is a broad ecosystem, a complex value chain that will only ever be as strong as its weakest link. Therefore, the new strategy and the measures it entails must take this reality into consideration, must be comprehensive and must seek to bolster as much as possible each of these important links.

With a new comprehensive and effective strategy in place, we are optimistic in the tourism industry's potential to not only recover to prepandemic levels in the next few years, but return to the annual growth performance it was achieving up until 2020. This, we further contend, will only be possible if private and public sector partners continue to work together and the right tools and measures are put in place.

You might not be surprised to hear me say that we fully welcomed the government's decision early last week to remove all remaining COVID entry restrictions—the testing, quarantine and isolation requirements—for anyone entering Canada and to lift the mandatory masking requirement.

In closing, I note that we are happy the ArriveCAN app will henceforth become a voluntary tool to help streamline the customs process. I am far from convinced that it was an effective tool for controlling the entry and spread of COVID, and I know how much it caused problems for travellers and tourism businesses.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

• (1125)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Potter.

Mr. Boudreau, you have five minutes, please.

**Mr. Trevor Boudreau (Manager, Government Relations, Vancouver Airport Authority):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*Translation*]

Good morning, everyone.

[*English*]

I'm grateful to be joining you today from my office here at YVR, which is located on the traditional and unceded territory of the Musqueam people. I pay my respects to elders past and present.

On behalf of the Vancouver Airport Authority, we appreciate the opportunity to present to the committee today.

With the federal government removing the mandatory requirements for travellers to submit their personal health and vaccination information, we are pleased that we can now go back to focusing on the original intended purpose for ArriveCAN: to support the continued modernization of Canada's customs processing, which benefits travellers, Canadians and indeed the entire Canadian economy.

YVR has a long history of partnering with the federal government to innovate and modernize traveller processing. I want to acknowledge and thank local CBSA staff, officers and senior departmental officials for their ongoing collaboration over the years.

In preparing for this appearance, I was looking at some old photos of our customs hall here at YVR, and I found one from 2005. It was a time when we were growing our passenger volumes exponentially, and we were deep in the throes of preparing to welcome the world for the 2010 Olympic Winter Games. At that time, it was a regular occurrence for the CBSA customs hall at YVR to be

packed with passengers. Planes had to be held at gates, and passengers waited hours in lineups as valuable customs officer time was spent reviewing administrative paperwork. Airlines that had connecting service to YVR were actively looking to divert to other U.S. airports and away from YVR completely.

Building our way out of that problem was not an option, so we sat down with the CBSA and, in partnership, looked at an innovative idea, one that combined ultra-efficient technology with live border official interaction. The result was the launch of YVR's border express primary inspection kiosks in 2008.

Today, as members of the committee likely know, these kiosks are widely used in airports and seaports around the world. In North America alone, these kiosks have safely processed over 250 million people without a security incident. Indeed, today a customs officer at YVR can securely process a full A380 aircraft—that's 469 passengers—in about 20 minutes.

Fifteen years ago, kiosks revolutionized customs processing. Now we're here in 2022, and we believe that the ArriveCAN platform will support the next natural evolutionary step in Canada's customs and border processing modernization. The optional advance declaration feature in ArriveCAN is a great example. Right now it seamlessly integrates with existing kiosk technology in the customs hall, and that's thanks to another YVR-CBSA partnership that occurred this past summer.

Today, passengers who use that optional feature in ArriveCAN cut their time in an airport customs hall by half compared with those who do not. That includes families that are arriving together, even when one or two of the loved ones may not be tech savvy or may not have access to a computer and need a bit of help at the kiosk from their family member to complete their declaration when they arrive.

Where we really see the benefit right now is in our international to domestic connections facility. Ms. Potter spoke about the importance of gaining greater access to tourism options, and this is doing it. Travellers who continue to use the ArriveCAN optional feature to submit their advance declaration have the peace of mind that they'll be able to make their connecting flight even if they have a short layover here at YVR, in Toronto or in Montreal, and soon at many other airports across Canada. That's going to be really important for the millions of travellers we're going to welcome through the winter months who need to quickly connect to another Canadian airport to experience our incredible tourism offerings in every part of the country.

In the future, the ArriveCAN platform will help border officials automate the recognition of individuals as the federal government expands its biometric requirements for travellers who apply for visas or for work or study permits as well as newcomers seeking to resettle here in Canada and contribute productively to Canada's economy.

In closing, our ask is the same as that of Ms. Pasher, and that is, first, please stay focused on how ArriveCAN can be used to best modernize while keeping Canada's borders safe and secure, and second, continue to work collaboratively with the entire air sector on that journey of innovation and modernization.

Thank you very much. I look forward to the discussion.

• (1130)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much to all the witnesses.

I'll now open the floor for questions.

Mr. Baldinelli, you have six minutes, please.

**Mr. Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being with us this morning. My only regret is that we did not have the opportunity to have this meeting several months earlier, with ArriveCAN and border restriction measures being lifted prior to our summer tourism season.

I want to begin with Dr. Chagla. Thank you for joining us.

On September 23, the Canadian Travel and Tourism Roundtable welcomed the release of a report called "Evaluating Canada's Pandemic Border and Travel Policies: Lessons Learned". You are one of the authors of that study. In the release, you're quoted as saying:

We have learned a lot since March 2020. It is no longer scientifically necessary or appropriate to use travel-related pandemic management tools almost three years after the start of COVID-19. Enough time has passed for us to make a scientific assessment as to whether the travel restrictions introduced by the federal government were successful in containing the spread of the virus and its variants.

I have just one question for you, Doctor. In your view, approximately when was it no longer necessary or appropriate to use travel-related pandemic management tools such as ArriveCAN at the border?

**Dr. Zain Chagla:** Thank you for the question.

Obviously hindsight is 20/20. I would say, though, that the data we used to generate that report really was about the lack of efficacy around a vaccine mandate for preventing transmission. Community transmission in local domains was much higher than what would be expected with travel. It became pretty apparent in the spring of 2022 that this was the case.

I think much of our data focused on before then, when there may have been debate, but in the spring of 2022, again, it was much more common, and much more of the transmission was occurring domestically. Many of the restrictions domestically had been lifted, recognizing that many of the measures were not really making sense in that context. Similarly, at the border, the measures were likely not offering any significant benefit at that point either.

**Mr. Tony Baldinelli:** I was hoping you could share a copy of that report with our committee for our records and for the report we'll be responsible for in a few weeks' time.

I'd like to go to Mayor Diodati.

Thank you for your presentation, Mayor. I know you've been aggressively advocating for many months for the removal of hindrances that exist at our border crossings. In fact, I believe the City of Niagara Falls even passed a resolution as early as May asking for ArriveCAN to be optional in many instances.

You talked about the impact on our city. How badly was the city of Niagara Falls impacted? You talked about some information from Niagara Falls Tourism and the Niagara Parks Commission. I'm wondering if you could quickly share some of that information.

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** Thank you for the question.

Yes, it's been hugely impactful and devastating. I'll just take one example—the Niagara Parks Commission. They have 1,100 employees, and typically, two-thirds of their revenue is international. Of course, a significant amount of that is U.S. visitation. Let's call it what it is. They're our number one market, of course, out of anywhere in the world, by far. They were down by over \$1 billion.

We focus on good customer service and treating our customers well, but when I look at the bridge numbers, the delays were four times what they should be because of ArriveCAN. That was with greatly reduced volume, so the customer service levels were very much lacking.

Another impact, Mr. Baldinelli, is on senior citizens who live in these communities. I was inundated with calls from these people, who said they felt they were being discriminated against. They were proud to show their passports and happy to show their vaccination status and boosters, but were offended that they were being forced to do something they couldn't do. We have the statistics.

Not to target seniors, but by and large they're not as tech savvy as younger kids are, and a lot of them could not do the app because they didn't have smart phones or computers. I don't have to look any further than my father, who is 80 years old and has a flip phone. This is what it's like living in a border community. We go over the river, just like you would cross town wherever you live. We go to visit our family and our friends.

It was disruptive to our family and friends in addition to the revenue. Every Thursday, my dad and mom would go over the river. They would go shopping. They'd visit some of their family and friends. They'd go out for dinner and they'd come back. They haven't done that in three years. They missed some very important and significant events—weddings, funerals and others.



I can tell you that seniors felt very discriminated against, because many of them do not have mastery of digital technology. To say that it's been devastating is an understatement. We're frustrated that we lost another tourism season to the international markets. We're looking for a recovery.

● (1135)

**Mr. Tony Baldinelli:** Thank you, Mayor Diodati.

I have a quick question for Ms. Potter.

You were here in June, and during your presentation at that time, I think you talked about 10 million day trips by American visitors. What's it going to take for us to get back to that figure? How long will it take? What's the impact of American visitation on the Canadian tourism sector?

**The Chair:** Please give a brief answer, Ms. Potter.

**Ms. Beth Potter:** We're expecting that it's going to take a number of years to get those numbers back up to where they were prepandemic.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Virani, please go ahead.

**Mr. Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.):** Thank you very much to all of the witnesses.

Dr. Chagla, I enjoy listening to you on the CBC. Thank you for your service.

Mayor Diodati, I appreciated being in your jurisdiction for our caucus meetings this summer.

I'm going to direct my first question to Mr. Boudreau.

What I thought was interesting is the exercise you took us through about Vancouver in 2005 and the challenges you faced. Working with government authorities, you came up with a workaround, which produced the kiosks with which we are now very familiar. You're analogizing where we are with ArriveCAN to the introduction of the kiosks about 14 years ago, by my account.

Can you pick up on something you said about working with airports and how we work with the airlines going forward? Just touch upon this, and I'll get to Ms. Pasher as well.

If ArriveCAN now has this advance declaration option, and it speeds up processing times by up to 50% for people who choose to use it, how do we make sure that enough people are aware of that feature and aware of the time savings it represents? How do we give them the ability to have it on their phones and access Wi-Fi or roaming when they're arriving?

One thing that I'm thinking about is the availability of Wi-Fi when you're on the tarmac. You could be doing that instead of filling out those old, cumbersome little five-by-seven forms that ask you about how much tobacco and alcohol you're bringing into the country. Do you have any thoughts on that?

**Mr. Trevor Boudreau:** Thanks for the question.

It's funny; I was thinking that too. I always remember being on a plane and fumbling for a pen or trying to ask a neighbour if I can get a pen to try to fill out those cards. I'm glad to see those gone.

When it comes to raising awareness of ArriveCAN, here's a stat for you. Right now, we see that here at YVR—and I believe it's roughly the same at all Canadian airports where folks can use it—about 30% of international travellers use the advance declaration feature. That's not bad, but we need to maintain it, at least, and grow it to achieve the benefits.

I told you about the connections facility. Our airline partners want to see connections done as quickly as possible and, to use a bit of an industry term, want to “turn the plane” as quickly as possible. It's a tremendous benefit for them. Anything we can do as a combined sector—airlines, airports, government partners, the federal government, yourselves as representatives—to raise awareness of that is important.

When it comes to the ability for folks to access Wi-Fi, I was just down in Blaine, Washington, before the federal requirement was lifted, and I was able to access the Wi-Fi at my hotel, use it to quickly file the ArriveCAN declaration and—Bob's your uncle—get through the border really fast. That's land mode.

Here at the air mode, folks are a little more used to filing their customs declarations, so we believe that through a concerted communications campaign, and building literacy and awareness, we'll be able to keep those numbers up and hopefully grow them.

**Mr. Arif Virani:** If I could, I'll turn to Ms. Pasher now.

Thank you for your presentation. At the very end, you reiterated some of the themes we heard from Mr. Boudreau, but you also mentioned towards the end that with this opportunity from the advance declaration, there also comes the need for a modernization of the Customs Act with respect to legislative authority. I wonder if you could concretize, itemize or specify the type of modernization you'd like to see in the Customs Act, if you have any concrete suggestions.

● (1140)

**Ms. Monette Pasher:** Sure. Just to follow up on the previous question, people can submit their advance declaration 72 hours in advance, so it doesn't need to be done on the plane. There is time in advance to do that. Right now it's only in place at Toronto Pearson and Vancouver, but we want to quickly move that to other airports across the country and continue this rollout of technology.

As to the next piece, moving forward, we see ArriveCAN as one element in improving processing at our airports. We need to modernize the Customs Act. We need to move away from customs officers needing to process every passenger. We need to get to a place where there is facial recognition and biometrics, like what you would see in Europe, where you go through the eGate and your picture is taken. You've already been pre-approved, and then you get a go or no-go sign, a green light or a red light. That's where we need to move in terms of border modernization in Canada.

We've been working on this for over a decade, and now is the time. I think we've seen this summer the challenges we have in processing, given we were in this pandemic space with all the different measures that were thrust upon our airports and the tourism industry.

Moving forward, air travel is going to continue to grow. It's going to double by 2040, and we need to be ready. We need to be prepared. I think we only need to look as far as Europe to see how we can do this the right way. I think the CBSA is ready for that, so the next step is our legislation and regulations and moving forward with that.

A big piece of that is ensuring that it's not going to be mandatory; it's going to be voluntary. The people who want to increase their throughput at the gates can do that, and the people who want to use paper and aren't good with technology can do it the old way. I think having that option there is also important.

**Mr. Arif Virani:** Thank you for those comments. One thing that I'd be concerned about specifically, if you're using visual technology and facial recognition, is how we ensure they're applied in a neutral manner and not disproportionately against people who dress a certain way, look a certain way or come from certain countries.

That was important commentary. Thank you.

**The Chair:** We'll move on to Monsieur Savard-Tremblay, for six minutes, please.

[Translation]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to greet my colleagues and thank all the witnesses for their presence and testimony.

My first question is for Mr. Chagla.

The use of ArriveCAN is now optional and is done on a voluntary basis. The various public health authorities are expecting, in a slightly more northern climate like ours, an increase in cases over the next few weeks and months. There is talk of a new wave.

If border measures were to be reinstated, how should the ArriveCAN application be improved to avoid the problems of the past, which you yourself have denounced today and in the past, and to ensure that there will be no similar problems in the future?

[English]

**Dr. Zain Chagla:** Thank you for the question. The big thing we're looking at is what's happening in Europe right now, where the virus continues to evolve. I think we all agree with that. The pathway for the virus to evolve is more immune evasion. As we have more populations that are immunized and more populations that have been infected, the virus is only going to gain mutations to then evade immunity more and more, which makes proof of vaccination even less prioritized in that context, given that with two doses, three doses or even four doses of vaccination, there will likely be a breakthrough rate that is significant, with a time-limited benefit to vaccinations for preventing infections. They are still important with respect to severe disease, but the use of vaccinations as a way to

separate people at high and low risk is likely coming off the table for a significant amount of time.

I would say the use of proof of vaccination to cross the border is not going to be effective in the foreseeable future given the way this virus continues to evolve to be more immune-evasive. Also, random testing is probably not going to be a long-term effective strategy considering that we've done a lot of work in terms of sequencing within our communities to identify variants of concern that have started circulating and that will likely start to circulate locally before we even identify they're a problem internationally. We've done a lot of work with waste water and other modalities that are passive to also integrate those into screening.

Again, the measures, I think, have little left in terms of their benefits, even with variant X or variant Y coming down the pipeline, and I think our focus should be on vaccinating locally, getting appropriate treatments locally and protecting high-risk populations locally, like those in long-term care and those who are immunocompromised, rather than using the border as a tool to mitigate something that can't really be mitigated at the border.

• (1145)

[Translation]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** If I summarize your answer correctly, we can't really improve ArriveCAN, and any action at the border would be null and void.

[English]

**Dr. Zain Chagla:** Yes, absolutely, and again, we've seen this across the world. More than 100 countries have largely dropped their border restrictions, the last being New Zealand, which is a country that really embraced every measure possible to reduce transmission. There's been a recognition that the measures at the border were not offering significant benefit and were causing significant pandemic disruption and that efforts locally were more important. They also dropped all measures in that context.

This is where we are in the world. We're not an outlier in this context.

[Translation]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** In that case, do you believe that we are now in the endemic phase of the crisis, that the pandemic phase is over, or that it will be over imminently?

[English]

**Dr. Zain Chagla:** We will likely have waves of transmission. How we mitigate those and how we mitigate things like isolation and health care, which are big problems as we move forward, how we mitigate vaccinations and vaccine fatigue and how we mitigate access to therapeutics are really going to define how impactful these waves are going to be. With as much population immunity as we have, though, through vaccination and natural infection—we have data from the Canadian immunity task force and from British Columbia suggesting that 60% to 70% of Canadians have had COVID—I think we are probably at a point where the disease is causing local transmission but not necessarily in an emergency phase.

I practise in an acute-care hospital in a large context with many complex patients. In the last three to four months, there have been between zero and five people in our ICU, and even some of them have not been there primarily for COVID reasons. That acute health care demand phase of COVID is probably settling down, and with everything we have, it probably won't be a major issue from an intensive-care standpoint.

[Translation]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** Ladies, as I only have 30 seconds left in my time, I am going to ask you a question, but, if you do not have time to answer it, you can complete your answer during the next round of questions.

You have told us how disadvantageous this has been for your respective sectors. How well did your documentation and research distinguish between what was caused by ArriveCAN and what was caused by the other measures?

[English]

**Ms. Monette Pasher:** I would say that at different stages of the pandemic, obviously, there were quite different challenges. In the earliest stages, ArriveCAN and the border processing by the CBSA were substantial challenges in terms of both staff shortages and processing. It took so much additional time at the desk with the border agent to go through this entire process. There was a lot of duplication.

As time moved on and we made the process more efficient, it became less about that and more about the staffing shortage across the board. I would say it depends on which stage you're talking about, but certainly in the early days it was a very large issue.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll move on to Mr. Bachrach, please, for six minutes.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thanks for allowing me to join your committee for a very interesting discussion.

It seems as though we're talking about two separate aspects of the issue here. We're talking about the appropriateness of the vaccination requirement at our borders, and we're talking about the application of the app. I want to separate those in my questioning. Perhaps I'll start with the former.

Dr. Chagla, I really appreciate not only your appearance today but your work over the course of the pandemic. I remember we had

you at the transport committee very early on to talk about some of the quarantine measures.

Perhaps I could start with a question about Canada's COVID outcomes. How has Canada fared in terms of COVID outcomes writ large compared with other G7 countries, and to what do you attribute that?

• (1150)

**Dr. Zain Chagla:** I think this is timely. There's a report from the Public Health Agency of Canada that talks about measures that have helped. Certainly there were difficult discussions in the first year, but we fared better than many other countries in the world did—the United States and those in Europe—in limiting morbidity and mortality from the disease. That's not to say we didn't have problems. As a clinician, I can remember the devastation that we had in long-term care facilities in the first couple of waves, and that really marked a very vulnerable group in the pandemic, which was disproportionately affected in that sense.

Similarly, I think of the appropriate and rapid access to vaccines and positive public health messaging. As the virus progressed and we were able to get vaccinated, that paid dividends on everything.

This is interesting when you start looking at the last year of the pandemic, from August 2021 to August 2022. Canada actually fared very well compared with other countries, including places that had significant measures, such as Hong Kong, which did not vaccinate its elderly appropriately. Once the virus made its way there, despite significant measures in place like masking, quarantine requirements and testing at the airport, the cumulative deaths per capita over the entire pandemic was higher in Hong Kong than in Canada. That really was marked over a couple of months of the pandemic.

I think Canada has done very well on this stage. It's hard to dissect what exactly it was, but I think the co-operation between provincial and federal governments, particularly in the first year and a half of the pandemic, and the widespread availability of vaccinations have largely put us front and centre as one of the countries that tried to balance everything appropriately going forward.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Thank you, Dr. Chagla.

When we talk about the border vaccine requirements, if I interpret what you're saying correctly, it seems that the government failed in not adapting its measures in response to changing information about the nature of the pandemic. Is that a fair characterization?

Can I add on a second question? I assume that you have conversations with folks at PHAC. Has anyone offered you an explanation of why they didn't adapt to changing conditions in a more timely way?

**Dr. Zain Chagla:** I'll answer the last question first.

I have not had a discussion with the Public Health Agency of Canada about the rationale for vaccine requirements—especially after some of us started questioning exactly what the requirements were.

I will say that many provinces recognized that proof of vaccination outside of special domains like health care and long-term care was unlikely to offer a significant benefit to the population to reduce transmission, and it was largely dropped. Many provinces started going through this in March and April as omicron started fading, recognizing again that the evidence behind a two-dose vaccine mandate or a single dose of Johnson & Johnson, which could have been a year or more ago, was that they likely had very little impact on pandemic transmission.

That was March and April of 2022. We're talking right now in September 2022 about finally dropping it at the airport to cross the border. There was a delay in recognizing that this was not an effective measure. Again, the impacts of it were felt across a number of different sectors.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Thanks, Dr. Chagla.

I'm going to try to sneak in one more question. It's for Mr. Boudreau from YVR.

We talk about the conversation around the app. There was a very loud outcry because of the delays it was causing, and particularly so at the land borders, because of accessibility issues for certain demographics. The call from some quarters was to scrap the app.

What I heard in the presentations from both you and Ms. Pasher was that this kind of approach has merit. When you heard calls from certain parties to scrap the app entirely, were you concerned that we were going to throw the baby out with the bathwater, so to speak, when it came to the potential of an app-based approach?

**Mr. Trevor Boudreau:** You said something off the top that was really important, and it's important for the committee to hear it again. We need to separate the requirements for vaccine and health information from the use and application of the app itself. The app and the platform it's based on will be an important part of Canada's modernization of the future border. There's no doubt about that.

We've been without the federal requirements only since Saturday, so we don't have data here at the airport to demonstrate whether that's improved. However, we can see that in other jurisdictions where similar travel measures have been taken away, there's been an improvement.

To circle back, the app is going to be incredibly important moving forward for Canada's borders, particularly in the air mode.

• (1155)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll move on to Mr. Lewis, for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Chris Lewis (Essex, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to all of the witnesses here today.

For everyone's clarification, this is a study on the impact of ArriveCAN on Canada. It's not on what it would look like going forward but on what the impact on Canadian businesses, families and

workers has been. That's what this study is all about. I'm going to stick to that line of questioning.

I have to say that I'm really proud to be sitting here surrounded by the MPs for Niagara and Sarnia, who represent incredibly busy border crossings, and by their neighbour. That MP and I are right by the busiest international border crossing in North America, in Windsor.

To Mr. Bachrach's statement about those who have called to scrap the app, well, I'm guilty as charged. My office was absolutely inundated with phone calls from businesses, from folks trying to get across, from nurses and from doctors who had glitches and had to spend time in quarantine for literally no reason other than the app had failed. If it meant fighting for people to have some normalcy in their life, then I'm proud to have done that.

My first question is for Mr. Boudreau and Ms. Pasher.

Last week at committee, we heard from the CBSA union. They said the app completely slowed down people crossing at the border. Would each of you please give us some background on that?

Before that—I'll probably have time for only two questions—I think it's important for me to note one more time, just so you both know, a story I told last week. Long story short, a business came in with four folks on a private plane. They sat on the apron in Windsor for two and a half hours because one of the four had a glitch in their app, not through their own fault. They stayed on the plane, then left and took their business with them.

I would love to hear from both witnesses about why they believe this app will actually help.

**Mr. Trevor Boudreau:** Ms. Pasher, maybe I can go first, if you want to go next.

**Ms. Monette Pasher:** Yes, sure.

**Mr. Trevor Boudreau:** Thank you.

It's important to recognize that we represent the air mode, and the land border is significantly different from the air border. I'm not an expert on the land border, so I'll leave my comments to the air border.

When it comes to the air border, folks are used to filing declarations or doing paperwork, as you're used to using technology to get through the border process. As I said in my last answer, we haven't had enough time since the federal restrictions were lifted on October 1 to measure a difference in processing times, but again, as we've seen, in other jurisdictions where those similar travel measures were removed—the requirement to submit health information and vaccine verification—there was an increase in speed in customs processing.

**Mr. Chris Lewis:** Thank you very much, sir.

Ms. Pasher, please go ahead.

**Ms. Monette Pasher:** I'd like to echo that same point about the differentiation between the land border and the air border, because the measures really are different.

In terms of the air border, our view is that if we hadn't had the ArriveCAN application, we would have been doing all of this manually, and it would have been taking a lot more time. Because of the health measures that were in place and because the government mandated them, we actually did need some technology application in order to process people. I think that would be our view. It was needed at the air border because of the pandemic restrictions.

**Mr. Chris Lewis:** Thank you to both of the witnesses.

I have 50 seconds left.

Mayor Diodati, our mayor in Windsor, Mayor Dilkens, was adamant as you were to get our borders back to some type of normalcy. Our casino and our tourism area, like yours, have been completely gut-punched.

I have 30 seconds, Mr. Diodati. Do you feel that ArriveCAN specifically contributed to this decline, more so than the vaccination status?

• (1200)

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** That's a tough one. Both of them were very detrimental to our border.

I did spend a lot of time on the phone with Mayor Dilkens. It was devastating to us. For us at land border crossings, it was horrible. It made the delays four times as long and even when there was much less congestion. It was absolutely the problem.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll move on to Mr. Arya, please, for five minutes.

**Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

We all agree that the health and safety of Canadians is the utmost priority for all of us around here—for all political parties and all MPs. Canada did well compared with other G7 countries and compared with most other countries because of all the measures that all levels of government implemented, with the co-operation of all Canadians. I think that compared with others, we are in better shape. Let's recognize that.

There is no one single measure that was more important there. It can be vaccination. It can be social distancing. It can be education. It can be ArriveCAN. It can be putting restrictions on people coming from abroad. All of these measures were added together for these fantastic results, compared with other countries.

On ArriveCAN, I did travel twice this summer. The first time, I used the Toronto airport. I was told that, when going, there would be a lot of rush and I would have to wait for hours to get through security, and that when coming back, because of ArriveCAN and other things, there would be long delays getting out of the airport. However, I can tell you that this was the shortest time I spent in the Toronto airport in July. When going, I went four hours early. I went in within 20 minutes and then had to sit in the terminal for all that time. Coming back, it was the same thing. It was the fastest thing. I used the Vancouver airport in August. It was the same thing there.

I'm not saying that others did not face delays, but my personal experience was that ArriveCAN or other measures did not contribute to delays, at least on my part.

Ms. Pasher, you mentioned that there has been a drop in and resistance from—and maybe I'm paraphrasing you—international travellers because of various measures. The pandemic has affected businesses throughout the world. The labour shortage has affected businesses throughout the world. The supply chain has affected businesses throughout the world. There are so many things that have affected businesses.

My specific question to you is about ArriveCAN. How much did ArriveCAN contribute to the drop in international passengers coming to Canada—ArriveCAN only?

**Ms. Monette Pasher:** I would say it really depends on what time frame you're looking at. You talked about Pearson and your experience this July and your experience in Vancouver. The challenges at our airports were more acute in April and May—

**Mr. Chandra Arya:** I'm sorry, but I have limited time. My question was very specific. How much did ArriveCAN contribute to the drop in international air passengers?

**Ms. Monette Pasher:** I don't have a specific number for that. I would say that ArriveCAN existed because of the vaccine mandate. It was an application to facilitate that. That was how people were getting through our border.

Ms. Potter may have a more definite number on that.

**Mr. Chandra Arya:** I'm sorry, but I'm still speaking to you. You mentioned that ArriveCAN actually eased the process given the delays that were occurring at the airports. Is that correct?

**Ms. Monette Pasher:** I'm saying the technology application eased it because we had to have.... The government mandated vaccines, and because the government—

**Mr. Chandra Arya:** Okay. Now that ArriveCAN is not mandatory, do you foresee a tremendous jump in international air travel during the coming months?

**Ms. Monette Pasher:** We're hearing from our business community, the tourism industry and our partners that U.S. travellers are willing—

**Mr. Chandra Arya:** You are the airport authority.

• (1205)

**The Chair:** Let the witness finish her answer, please.

**Ms. Monette Pasher:** U.S. travellers are more willing to come to Canada now. They're more willing to consider our destination for events and business events because they don't have the risk of being randomly tested, potentially being positive and having to quarantine. Because these measures are removed, there's more appetite—

**Mr. Chandra Arya:** Once again, you are speaking to other quarantine measures. We are discussing ArriveCAN. That is the question here.

Specifically to ArriveCAN, now that ArriveCAN is not there, do you think that is a major factor for international air travellers coming in?

**The Chair:** Please give a very brief answer.

**Ms. Monette Pasher:** Yes, I do. ArriveCAN was there because of the vaccine mandate, so they're connected. You can't just—

**Mr. Chandra Arya:** Okay, I have—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but your time is up.

Go ahead, Mr. Savard-Tremblay, for two and a half minutes, please.

[Translation]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** You have painted a picture of the consequences of the measures and ArriveCAN for your sector. In your study, have you isolated what was caused by ArriveCAN and what was caused by the other measures? How can you separate out all of that and say with certainty that ArriveCAN was the problem?

[English]

**Ms. Beth Potter:** ArriveCAN certainly had a huge impact at the land border crossings. These were crossings where people were not used to having to make any other kind of declaration. They would drive up and have a conversation with the customs border agent, and would show their documentation coming into Canada, whether it was their driver's licence or their passport. The ArriveCAN app and the requirements of the ArriveCAN app had a massive effect. We were seeing a drop of 50% or more in the number of Americans coming into the country, and the reason was the ArriveCAN app.

When you look at the other problems, you also had some glitches with the app. You had travellers getting messages telling them that they had to quarantine when they didn't. You had travellers out there trying to reroute how they were using the app in order to get away from these quarantine notices. That was a huge challenge.

When you look at the other restrictions, and certainly the proof of vaccination and the random testing, they created uncertainty for international travellers. I mentioned in my opening remarks that international travel this year was down 53%. That's \$12 billion that didn't come into the country because of travel requirements.

As an example, Monette was talking earlier about business events. We had U.S. events in Canada, and on average, we were only getting 60% of attendees. Forty per cent were staying home, and when they were asked about this, it was because of the restrictions and the requirements.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Bachrach, go ahead for two and a half minutes, please.

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

I'd like to direct my next question to Mayor Diodati.

What you said about your dad really rang true for me. You said he is in his eighties and only has a flip phone. My dad is 75 and he

doesn't have any phone. Prior to the pandemic he was driving down to the United States to visit family quite a bit, and it was such a hassle for him to use the app that he's avoided those trips since then.

Now that the app is optional at the land border, do you foresee it continuing? I've heard the stories about border agents essentially having to be IT help desks, and that is causing long delays at the land borders. With the app being optional at the land border, do you foresee those delays continuing to be a concern, or do you foresee a future in which we can move forward with some travellers using the app at the land border and others using a more manual process?

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** I like the idea that it's optional in the same way that NEXUS is, and time will tell. Early on I resisted NEXUS, but I became a convert because it definitely made things more efficient because you could go to NEXUS-only lines. If it is done well, and they fix the glitches and the problems....

The other thing I'll say about it—and my family saw this firsthand—is that the app forces you to lie. It wants to know your quarantine address. Day trippers who come to Niagara Falls don't have an address, because they're going home the same day, so they have to lie. Some of them were putting in the Peace Bridge address. These are law-abiding citizens, people who don't want to lie but whose only other choice was to not come here.

Yes, going forward, we will recover. There's no doubt about that because resilience is kind of built into our DNA. It seems there is always some kind of challenge. The question is, how long is it going to take and how many billions are we going to lose? How many lives have been disrupted because people can't cross now or they're too old to cross? I do think having it as an option is good if they can fix the glitchiness.

The last thing I'll say is about the border. The big challenge is the fact that there are competing cell towers along the U.S.-Canadian border and the coverage is spotty at best, so it's a real challenge when you're on that bridge trying to do anything with your phone.

● (1210)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Ms. Rood, go ahead for five minutes, please.

**Ms. Lianne Rood (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

Like my colleagues who spoke before me, I was one of the ones who were calling for the scrapping of the app, and for a very long time. Coming from a community that is very close to and borders the United States, across from Michigan, my office was inundated for months and months on a daily basis with dozens of phone calls and emails. Senior citizens were coming into my office in tears, totally distraught because they weren't able to cross the border. They didn't have a smart phone. They didn't have a data plan on a phone. They had already been separated from their loved ones for a couple of years and just wanted life to get back to normal.

This app had devastating impacts on the tourism industry along Lake Huron and also along Mitchell's Bay. I think about Wallaceburg. I think about Mitchell's Bay, Walpole Island, all the way up the St. Clair River through Sarnia and all the way along southern Lake Huron, which I represent.

We didn't have boaters coming in the summertime, as we should have, because the app was a major impediment to their coming across. You don't necessarily have cellphone service out on the lake. People didn't have cellphones, as I said, with data when they were crossing land borders, so there was a very big series of frustrations for a lot of the people and our businesses in Lambton—Kent—Middlesex.

I witnessed many businesses empty at night. During evenings on the streets of Grand Bend, which would be a booming tourist town full of people from Michigan, much like Niagara Falls, there were no people there.

Mayor, I can sympathize with you given what your city has gone through. I witnessed how border lineups were non-existent coming across through New York from Buffalo to Niagara Falls, and when there were only a few cars, it took an hour because people were having issues with the app. The frustration is real.

I'd like to ask Ms. Potter a question.

We have heard the Canadian Federation of Independent Business say that approximately one in six businesses is considering closing its doors even still because of the devastating impacts of ArriveCAN. I'm just wondering if you could speak to any instances of this, or to what you've seen from small businesses and the impacts of this app and what the cost may have been to the small business industry, which is what most of our tourist towns are made up of—very small independent businesses.

**Ms. Beth Potter:** For businesses in border towns, what they will remember—and what they are still stinging from—is the impact of the passport requirement post-9/11. Canadians are much more adaptable to new technologies and new requirements than Americans are, and I say that with a large American family of my own. The fact of the matter is that needing a passport to go back into the United States prevented many Americans from travelling for 10 years.

It took us 10 years to see the usual number of Americans coming across the border to go into our border towns to enjoy our retailers and our tourism businesses. It was 10 years, and this is what businesses are afraid of. They are afraid that they are going to see another 10-year lag and they just can't afford that.

When you add that on top of the additional debt burden they've taken on because of trying to stay alive during the pandemic years and trying to keep their businesses afloat, we're just adding an increased burden on these businesses. A lot of them are looking at this and saying, "This is my future and my retirement. Am I going to be able to continue to support my family?" They're making the decision to close and do something else instead.

● (1215)

**Ms. Lianne Rood:** It's very troubling to hear that. I've seen businesses in many of my communities shut their doors because of that.

Mr. Mayor, maybe you can help with this, considering that yours is a border town. What would you like to see the federal government do to help bring back tourists, especially from the United States? There is still a hesitancy from a lot of U.S. residents to come over to Canada. We've seen the morale drop. People don't want to come to Canada. What would you suggest? We only have about 30 seconds.

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** I think we need a major advertising campaign in the U.S. If our removing of restrictions is the best kept secret, it's not going to help us and it's going to delay the recovery. We need a major advertising campaign targeting the U.S. market and the international market, letting them know that, once again, we're open for business.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Miao, you have five minutes, please.

**Mr. Wilson Miao (Richmond Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses attending today's important study on this impact of ArriveCAN.

First, I would like to acknowledge Mr. Boudreau, who has done a great job with YVR. I do travel often between YVR and Ottawa nowadays.

I want to direct the following question to you.

As you know, many businesses, globally and locally, are facing tremendous challenges during the global pandemic, ranging from interrupted production, supply chain destruction, rapid shifts in demand, staff shortages and elevated commodity prices. Despite the significant challenges, Canada's two-way trade in goods and services rose by 14.1% in 2021 and reached a new record high of \$1.5 trillion. This is a testament to the adaptability and resilience of Canadian businesses, workers and entrepreneurs.

Given that other Canadian sectors and overall Canadian trade are improving, have you experienced an increase in flights related to trade at the Vancouver airport? How has that been affected by the impacts of the ArriveCAN application?

**Mr. Trevor Boudreau:** I appreciate the compliments, but I'm an avatar for the more than 24,000 people who work at YVR every day and directly contribute to a positive experience for our travellers. Thank you for that on behalf of everybody.

In terms of trade, historically for the airport, cargo generally does come in the belly of passenger aircraft. Before the pandemic, about 70% of cargo in trade was enabled through “belly cargo”, which is what we call it here. That's changing, and that's changing quite fundamentally.

Because of the impacts of the pandemic, of course, there weren't as many passengers, so those planes were coming in full of boxes and goods. I'm sure folks have seen lots of pictures. Of course, here on the west coast, we experienced a tremendous climate-fuelled weather disaster that wreaked havoc on our roads and rail, so the air mode was able to pick up a bit of the slack. We actually see a tremendous opportunity and, as such, are investing a significant amount of money to expand our cargo operations here at the airport in support of Canada's economy and in support of Canadian cargo operators, and that's important.

On the challenge with the vaccination and health information mandate that had to be submitted through ArriveCAN, any delay that would have impacted a connection at any point in an aircraft's journey—and that may not have been at YVR; it could have been at another airport, like an international airport—also impacted the ability of goods to arrive on time. It exacerbated some of the challenges you mentioned in your opening remarks about supply chains.

The faster our sector can get back to what we once were, which was essentially operating like a Swiss watch—where we were moving just-in-time supply chains expertly, with passengers' bags and packages—the better things will be for everybody.

**Mr. Wilson Miao:** You mentioned that the application is an important part of modernizing the future of travelling. Do you have any suggestion for how we can better improve this application to make it more convenient for international travellers, or even local travellers, and not just in their experience through YVR airport but at any international airport across Canada?

• (1220)

**Mr. Trevor Boudreau:** I think there will be a lot of lessons learned about how the application was rolled out. It was rolled out rather quickly through a pandemic, so maybe some of the testing that would normally have been done didn't happen. Certainly there's a great discussion to be had about how we can ensure, whenever we're launching new technology here in Canada, that accessibility is front and centre.

Here at YVR, when we're developing technology, we develop it with security and privacy by design. I have no doubt that the CBSA did not do the same with ArriveCAN, but that's important too.

Fundamentally, what this comes down to is that everyone has to row the boat together and help folks understand. Let's build literacy about how to use these applications. I use the example of a multi-generational family arriving at YVR. Folks who are a little more tech savvy can use ArriveCAN in advance, and then they can help their family members who aren't as tech savvy.

Like Mr. Bachrach and Mayor Diodati, I have parents in their seventies with questionable tech skills, so I often operate as a tech help desk. That's really important for folks.

When they come in through the air mode, the utilization of ultra-efficient technology, with the ability for border guards to see non-trusted and potentially riskier travellers so they can do the job they need to do to protect our borders, is going to be critical in the system.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll move on to Ms. Gladu for five minutes.

**Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC):** Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I'm going to start off with a question for the mayor.

The Blue Water Bridge in my riding saw many of the same issues that you've detailed. We saw delays four times as great or more, with many individuals who were fined and quarantined even though they were fully vaccinated and asymptomatic, seniors calling my office crying and many people feeling quite abused.

At the end of the day, it seems to me that the mandatory use of ArriveCAN was discriminatory to seniors who weren't tech savvy and people who didn't have a smart phone. Would you agree with that?

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** Yes, 100%. I was inundated with calls from seniors all over the region, and in different ridings and municipalities as well, because I was a voice defending their concerns. There was no question at all that they definitely felt targeted throughout this. They felt helpless. One gentleman said, “I feel stranded. I haven't been able to visit my family.” He was very frustrated and hurt.

**Ms. Marilyn Gladu:** We had the same thing. Of course, in a border town many people are used to going across the border every day for shopping and visiting family. Many people have partners, and their relationships were damaged by this long border barrier.

One thing we saw as well was that many people who crossed the border and filled out their ArriveCAN would get emails two or three days afterwards. Nobody would say anything to them at the border, but two or three days later they would get emails saying that they had missed their first test and that they should be quarantining. Meanwhile, they'd been three days wandering around the community because nobody had told them anything about it. Then they were threatened with fines.

Did you have anything like that happening in your riding?



**Mr. Jim Diodati:** Yes, daily, and that's why people were so concerned and worried. They weren't little fines. My brother was visiting his son, who was going to school in the U.S., and when he and my sister-in-law came across the border, for some reason the results, after they paid for their PCR tests, didn't come through. They were threatened with \$5,000 fines—one each for him and my sister-in-law.

A lot of people, and we can imagine a lot of seniors, get very worried, so what do they do? They avoid it. It's like their freedom was taken away from them for a few years. I feel bad for those people, but I would hear those kinds of horror stories on a regular basis from tourists and locals alike. I was inundated and they kept asking, "Is anybody listening? Why aren't they reacting?"

**Ms. Marilyn Gladu:** Thank you for that.

I have some questions for Ms. Potter.

I have a lot of relatives in the U.S., and I agree with your statement that many Americans were totally unaware of the requirement for ArriveCAN. What should we have done or could we do to make international travellers—especially those from the U.S., which is such an important partner for us—aware of the requirement?

**Ms. Beth Potter:** I agree with Mayor Diodati's recommendation. We need to get the word out. I'm looking at organizations like Destination Canada, the provincial and territorial tourism marketing agencies. They will need to incorporate this kind of information in their campaigns to the U.S. for us to try to overcome what has been a barrier to Americans coming into Canada.

• (1225)

**Ms. Marilyn Gladu:** I have a question for Ms. Pasher about international travellers coming in and the impact of the ArriveCAN app. Can you talk a bit more about that? You had some information there about the drop-off in international folks due to ArriveCAN. I would like to hear more about that.

**Ms. Monette Pasher:** I think the vaccine requirement and the pandemic measures, which were facilitated through the ArriveCAN app, were a barrier to travel. We have heard numerous examples of it here today. There were also places like Whistler, for skiing. We heard it was mainly U.S. travellers, and they certainly saw the impact of that. Having these pandemic measures in place had an impact on our tourism industry, our airports and our airline partners.

**The Chair:** You have 20 seconds left.

**Ms. Marilyn Gladu:** Thank you to the witnesses.

I'm glad to see that ArriveCAN is gone, and I hope it doesn't come back.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. The point is noted.

Mr. Arya, go ahead for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Chandra Arya:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

The pandemic has been quite frustrating to all, especially businesses. The pandemic issues now may be due to the pandemic supply chain problems and the related labour shortages. All of these have contributed to a lot of problems, especially for the tourism industry.

I have travelled within Canada, and probably more now than in the last three or four years. I have stayed in Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver and other places. Getting a hotel room is quite difficult, and rooms are really expensive.

**Ms. Potter,** it's nice seeing you again. It's twice in 24 hours. You mentioned there was a drop of 15% or 50% in the number of people crossing the border by car. How much was it?

**Ms. Beth Potter:** It's 50%.

**Mr. Chandra Arya:** You also mentioned in your opening statement that international travellers tend to stay longer and spend more than domestic travellers. Which category do you think spends more? Is it the people crossing at land borders or the international air travellers from Europe, Asia and other places?

**Ms. Beth Potter:** We certainly know that the farther somebody travels to Canada, the longer they stay and the more they spend.

**Mr. Chandra Arya:** Basically it's the air travellers who tend to stay for a longer period.

**Ms. Beth Potter:** Yes.

**Mr. Chandra Arya:** Again, my question to you is, how much of the drop in business from international air travellers is related only to ArriveCAN?

**Ms. Beth Potter:** That is a really hard question to answer. What we know is that we lost 53% of international visitation into Canada—

**Mr. Chandra Arya:** I understand that. People are frustrated due to everything related to the pandemic—labour shortages, supply chain problems, inflation. There are people who are opposed to vaccinations. They are all zeroing in on one thing: ArriveCAN. It is very easy to take out our frustrations on something else, and now there is ArriveCAN. They say to take it out and everything will go back to normal. Is that the case?

**Ms. Beth Potter:** I would suggest that we were not zeroing in on just one thing and that ArriveCAN was one of—

**Mr. Chandra Arya:** Exactly. The point of this committee study is ArriveCAN. Again, my question is, how much did ArriveCAN contribute to the drop in international air travellers?

**Ms. Beth Potter:** Again, I don't have that number.

**Mr. Chandra Arya:** Okay.

Domestic tourism is increasing, which is a good thing, in my view. I'm from Ottawa and I was on the board of Invest Ottawa. People think it's a government town. We want to change that. The technology sector here is one of the biggest sectors, probably the biggest in Canada, which is surprising to many people.

The second thing about the innovation technology sector...we have identified tourism. Ottawa is a beautiful place. The national capital region is a beautiful place. We want domestic tourism to improve.

Have the problems with international travel contributed to the increase in domestic tourism?

• (1230)

**Ms. Beth Potter:** Certainly we are seeing domestic tourism coming back and coming back faster than international travel is. It is still down across the country by about 16%. One of the things we found was that when our borders were closed, Canadians were exploring their own country and discovering places within the country that they didn't really realize were there. So instead of saying, "I want to go on a hike to base camp on Mount Everest", they were saying, "I'll hike in Banff", as an example. They are saying how great that was.

Canadians also like to get on a plane and go elsewhere. As much as domestic travel has rebounded over the last year or year and half, we are also anticipating that we will start to see that travel deficit come back up again as Canadians get on planes and go elsewhere.

**Mr. Chandra Arya:** You say that—

**The Chair:** You have 20 seconds left.

**Mr. Chandra Arya:** Okay, I will ask this quickly.

Domestic tourism has gone down by 16%, so why is it very difficult to get a hotel room?

**Ms. Beth Potter:** Contrary to popular belief, hotels aren't filled to 100% of the rooms they have. They are filled to the capacity of customers they can service. A hotel may be operating at only 60% or 70%. That's why it's been very difficult to get bookings in some parts of the country.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Savard-Tremblay, go ahead for two and half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

My question is quite simple.

I can't remember which of the witnesses talked about the need to promote the lifting of restrictions. Does that mean anything to you? That is what I want to ask about. If the person recognizes their testimony, I invite them to raise their hand, please.

My question is this: should we now promote the use of the ArriveCAN application, which is now voluntary?

Bearing in mind that it is a tool that can now be used on a voluntary basis, is it useful enough to be promoted?

My question is for anyone who wants to answer it.

[*English*]

**Ms. Monette Pasher:** I think we need to separate promoting our tourism industry and saying that Canada is open for business from advocating for this tool, this application, that can help travellers fill out a declaration in advance and help with processing at our air-

ports. I believe there's messaging we can use with our government agencies to support airports and airlines, but I think the promotion of Canada is separate from that.

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** I'll jump in and say that it's not helpful at land border crossings. I can't speak for airports, but I can tell you that the majority of people come into this country through land border crossings, and it is not helpful at land border crossings.

**Ms. Beth Potter:** I would just add that having only one version of the tool is not helpful given the multiple languages we encounter with international visitors coming in or from an accessibility standpoint, whether for seniors or for others. Always having an alternative method of communicating and sharing the information that's being asked for is something we need to have regardless of which way we go forward.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

You have 18 seconds.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Simon-Pierre Savard-Tremblay:** I have no further questions. Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Bachrach, go ahead for two and half minutes.

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

Maybe I'll just ask Ms. Potter a follow-up question on her last point. She said, if I understood correctly, that having an alternative option for people who struggle with the technology or who don't have access to the technology would have avoided a lot of the problems we saw at land borders and air borders. I appreciate that this is sort of a retrospective on how things could have been done better.

Separate from the question of whether the vaccine requirement was appropriate, given that the government put the vaccine requirement in place at the borders, do you feel that having the app as an option as opposed to a requirement would have avoided a lot of the challenges we saw?

• (1235)

**Ms. Beth Potter:** I certainly do. I think you can look at how we process people through our borders and at the ability to make a declaration verbally, which we've been doing for years at the land borders, with people coming into the country and declaring verbally how much they are bringing back into the country. This is a process that was put in practice and well used. Mandating people to use a tool they weren't familiar with, a tool that took some time to fill out and caused massive delays at border crossings in the country, really caused damage to Canada's reputation and brand. That is something that will take time for us as an industry to undo.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Madam Chair, can I ask one very brief question of Mr. Boudreau?

**The Chair:** You have 40 seconds left.

**Mr. Taylor Bachrach:** Thank you.

Again, I understand that this is a bit of a hypothetical exercise, but let's say we separate the two aspects of this issue and set aside the questions around the necessity of the vaccine mandate at the borders. If we went back in time and didn't have the ArriveCAN app at airports, would the delays have been better or worse than what we saw using the app? I'm assuming that the border agents would have had to look at vaccine verification from all sorts of different countries, which in itself could potentially have caused delays.

Can you speculate a bit on what the situation would have looked like without the app but with the vaccine requirement?

**Mr. Trevor Boudreau:** I won't speculate, but I'll go back to the data. Certainly at the beginning of the pandemic, when we didn't have another way to verify, or when the border agents didn't and were doing it on paper, as officials from the Public Health Agency were, it was slower at the air border.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Baldinelli, you have two minutes.

**Mr. Tony Baldinelli:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to follow up with Ms. Potter.

Recently, in September, Statistics Canada released their leading indicators on tourism activity. They showed that for the month of August, about 1.1 million land border crossings occurred from the U.S. into Canada, so it was still down about 50%.

I want to touch on quickly, if I could, what we need to do with Destination Canada to begin the process of marketing in the United

States. Did you find that Destination Canada funding this year was similar to what it was in the past? Were additional marketing funds put in to help advertise in the United States? What do you recommend going forward? Is there a budget number that you would like to see?

**Ms. Beth Potter:** We are in the process of finalizing our budget recommendations going forward, but certainly we would like to see Destination Canada receive some additional funds specifically to re-engage the U.S. traveller, whether that's a day traveller coming across, a leisure traveller or a business traveller. We need to regain the confidence of the American market that Canada is not just a safe place to travel to but an easy place to travel to so they won't get caught up—

**Mr. Tony Baldinelli:** Thank you.

I'll quickly go to Mayor Diodati, just following up on Destination Canada.

For many years—I believe it's 11—we had a representative sitting on the board of directors of Destination Canada. Being the number one leisure tourism destination in all of Canada, I expect, and hopefully you agree, that Niagara Falls deserves a seat on that board. Do you agree?

**Mr. Jim Diodati:** I 100% agree with that. I appreciate you bringing that forward. I hope there will be consideration for that. Our last member, Dragan Matovic, is no longer there. We definitely would like representation. I think it makes a lot of sense.

**The Chair:** All right. I want to thank the witnesses very much for their time and attention regarding this important issue for us.

We will suspend and then go in camera.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*

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