

Minister of Transport



Ministre des Transports

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0N5

October 28, 2022

Honourable Senators,
Members of the House of Commons:

I am pleased to table in Parliament the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority's (CATSA's) 2022-2023 to 2026-27 Corporate Plan Summary. The measures outlined in this document include CATSA's continued focus on security while working to ensure the health and safety of all those working in, and travelling through, Canadian airports.

During the timeframe when this plan was being developed, the Government ensured CATSA maintained full funding so it could be ready to respond when traveller demand rebounded from the historic lows experienced during COVID-19. However, the very rapid increase in traveller demand in the spring and summer of 2022 exceeded the ability of CATSA and other operators to quickly scale back up their services, and this adversely affected the air travel experience of Canadians. The situation this summer was unacceptable.

Congestion, delays, and cancellations within air travel have been a global phenomenon, as passenger numbers quickly rose following the more than 90% drop that resulted from COVID-19. As pandemic measures began to ease around the world, the air sector saw a significant surge in demand coupled with a tight labour market. This pressure led to acute delays and congestion at some major Canadian airports, particularly Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal. Following a very rapid increase in traffic over spring 2022, whereby traffic increased by over 250% between January and August, passenger volumes have stabilized at about 80% of 2019 levels. In comparison, the increase in the U.S. during the same period was 64%.

In early May 2022 when problems became evident, as Minister of Transport, I instructed my officials to bring together key industry players and government partners to identify immediate solutions. More specifically, Transport Canada (TC) established operational working groups to identify problems, causes, and solutions. Membership includes senior officials from airports, airlines, CATSA, NAV Canada, Canada Border Services Agency, and the Public Health Agency of Canada. My colleagues and I continue to actively work with industry daily to implement solutions to improve services while maintaining high levels of safety and security.

In response, airports deployed resources to facilitate passenger movements and improved communications with operators and travellers. Air carriers also made changes to their schedules to mitigate delays and cancellations. CATSA, for its part, has taken important measures to help ease pressures on screening service wait times. CATSA's third-party screening contractors have been in full recruitment mode since summer 2021. CATSA has hired over 2,000 screeners since April 2022 and its workforce is now comparable to the pre-pandemic period. Efforts to increase screening officer staff levels at all airports continue.

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Furthermore, an exemption provided by TC has allowed new screeners to provide some additional support on screening lines while they complete training and certification. Finally, as of October 1, 2022, we have removed all mandatory health measures for travel.

These efforts have yielded positive impacts. CATSA has seen wait times improve significantly since the onset of airport congestion witnessed in spring 2022, particularly at the four major airports. For example, in early May 2022, 22% of passengers waited more than 15 minutes to be screened at the top four airports, while this number dropped to less than 10% by Labour Day 2022. The wait times continue to improve, with 9% of passengers waiting more than 15 minutes the week of October 3 - 9, 2022.

Thanks to these joint efforts, things are moving in the right direction, but we know some passengers are still experiencing issues. To address ongoing issues, the Government of Canada's robust Air Passenger Protection Regulations are in place and clarify minimum standards of treatment and compensation that must be provided to passengers based on the level of control an airline has over a flight disruption.

It is my expectation that CATSA's next Annual Report will provide a detailed accounting of the challenges it encountered in providing adequate service in 2022-23, and its ongoing work to support air sector recovery.

The Government of Canada is working closely with its partners and stakeholders to make the additional changes needed to strengthen the operation of the air travel system to avoid a repeat of the congestion problems recently experienced and build a better air travel system for all users.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Omar Alghabra', written in a cursive style.

The Honourable Omar Alghabra, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Transport