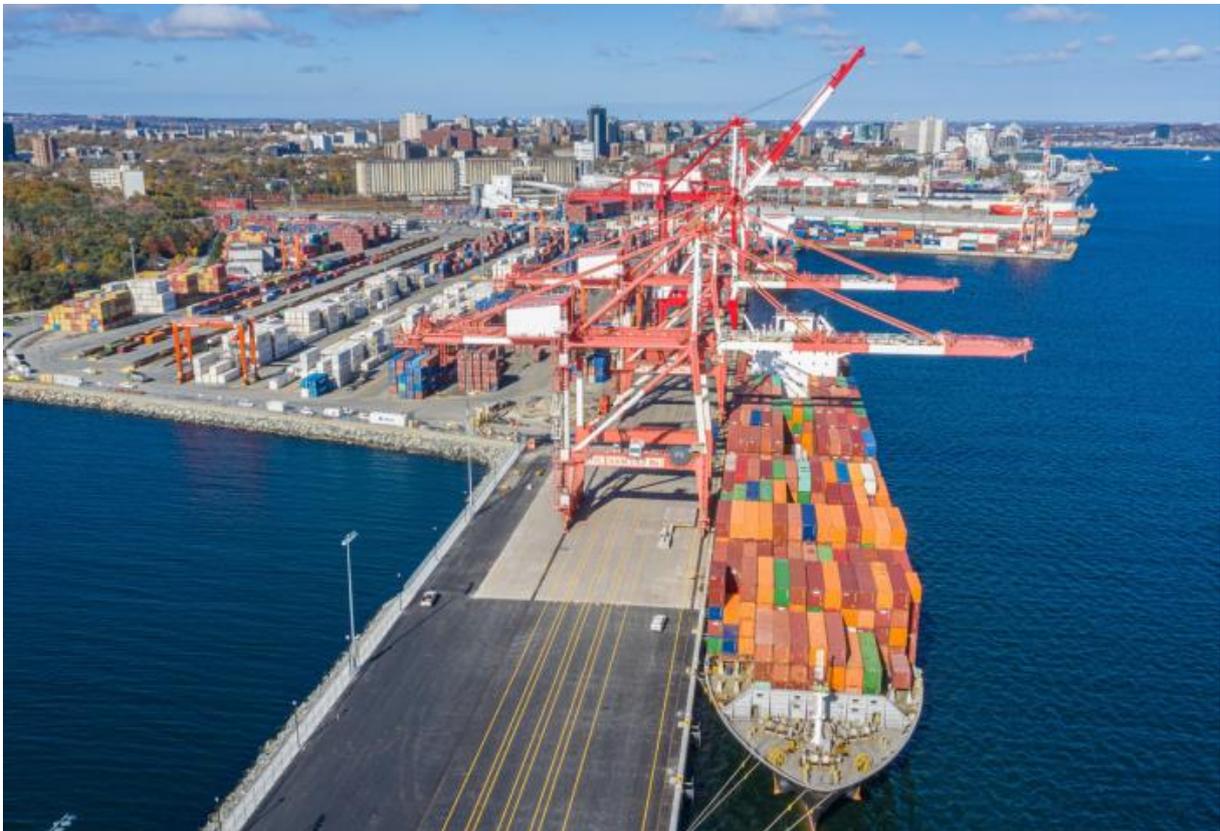


# Port of Halifax monitoring impasse between Canadian railways and union members

May 31, 2024



PSA Halifax

The Port of Halifax in Nova Scotia, Canada, is bracing for operational impacts should the two major freight railways and their union employees fail to reach a labor agreement later this year and go on strike.

“Supply chains are interconnected, and what happens to one partner will have a domino effect on another. The Port of Halifax is monitoring for potential impacts,” Port of Halifax spokesperson Lori MacLean told *Container News*.

Industry stakeholders have been concerned that members of the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference (TCRC) could go on strike, especially after TCRC members voted 95.3% in early May in favor of doing so. TCRC represents more than 9,000 employees at the Canadian operations of Canadian National Railway Co. (CN) and Canadian Pacific Kansas City Ltd. (CPKC), Container News reported.

The labor contract between the rail lines and the union workers expired on 21 December 2023.

Both CPKC and CN have indicated that they continue to negotiate with union members, according to recent announcements. The Canada Industrial Relations Board (CIRB) has also been studying how a potential work stoppage could affect rail service on the Canadian rail network. Canadian Federal Minister of Labour Seamus O'Regan had requested the CIRB look into the issue amid concerns from industry groups about a potential strike, according to a 22 May TCRC update.

CIRB's deadline for feedback on the situation from the railways, the union and other stakeholders was 21 May, and replies are due 31 May. It's uncertain when CIRB will render a decision, although a strike could occur legally following the decision. Union members would also need to give a 72-hour notice that a strike would be taking place.

"Recognizing our supply chains require certainty, now more than ever, CPKC has proposed to the TCRC that both parties agree on the services that should be maintained in the event of a strike or lockout," CPKC said in a 16 May update. "We believe this would eliminate the need for the CIRB referral process and bring much needed clarity regarding the timing of any potential strike or lockout."

CPKC also indicated in that update that it didn't anticipate any work stoppage or lockout would happen before mid-July, based on precedent.

As stakeholders wait for the CIRB to render its decision, Canadian ports like Halifax are hoping for a positive outcome.

"Rail serves approximately 60% of containerized cargo business at the Port of Halifax. Cargo imported at Halifax travels largely by rail to other parts of the continent; and cargo exported from Halifax is delivered largely to the Port by rail as well," MacLean said. "Rail is a vital link connecting communities and supporting economic activity. We're hopeful there will be a resolution acceptable to all parties."