



The Port of Saint John is pictured in this file photo.
Photo: Brunswick News Archives

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Noushin Ziafati | Telegraph-Journal

The Saint John region is bracing itself for possible impacts as a result of blockades on a rail link to eastern Canada.

The country's biggest cargo railway, Canadian National Railway Company, has cancelled 400 trains in the past week and said on Thursday that it was forced to initiate a "disciplined and progressive shutdown" of its operations in eastern Canada, possibly leading to temporary layoffs. VIA Rail has suspended its passenger service until further notice.

The railway blockades come as a result of protests that have raged across Canada this past week in solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en people, as Coastal GasLink forges ahead with a pipeline planned to run through the group's traditional and unceded land.

David Duplisea, CEO of the Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce, said the chamber is "very concerned" about the potential damage the blockades will have on businesses in the Saint John region and the Canadian economy as a whole.

Duplisea said they are writing a letter to urge the federal government and MPs to sit down and come to a "quick, safe and speedy" resolution.

"If you look at it sort of from a holistic point of view, there's a lot of goods that are being transported that are perishable, there's various levels of supply chain that are looking for just-in-time product ... so the repercussions of holding up the transportation of goods and people could potentially have devastating effects," he said.

Duplisea added that if the blockages go on long enough, "it will affect the supply chains" and "our reputation as a stable trading partner."

According to Port Saint John spokesperson Paula Copeland, the primary terminals at the port authority's facilities who are served by rail are DP World Saint John, Barrack Point Potash Terminal, and American Iron and Metal.

As of 3 p.m. on Friday, Copeland said DP World Saint John is working with their railway and shipping line partners to ensure cargo is moving.

"At the moment, DP World Saint John is still handling import and export freight from central Canada with minor rail service delays reported. While DP World Saint John are experiencing higher

than normal dwell times for cargo destined for Toronto and points west, they are not experiencing any terminal congestion problems at this time," she said.

Blockades at the Barrack Point Potash Terminal, which is operated by Canpotex, have resulted in a "complete stoppage of export cargo flow to the potash terminal," Copeland added.

Meanwhile, AIM Saint John has had no issues to date with respect to rail services.

"We would love ... a safe and quick resolution to the issues," Copeland said.

Mary Keith, spokesperson for J.D. Irving, Limited said in an email statement the current loss of CN service is "a major disruption to consumers as well as industries looking to receive supplies and ship products made by Canadians to valued customers."

"We encourage all involved to quickly find a way forward," Keith added.

Saint John–Rothesay MP Wayne Long said in a statement Thursday that blockages to this link impedes Saint John region business, and in turn puts the jobs of "hundreds, if not thousands" of people in the riding at risk.

The Telegraph-Journal reached out to other business and industry groups for comment, including Irving Oil, but did not hear back in time for publication.

– *With files from Savannah Awde*

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