



John Wishart, CEO of the Chamber of Commerce for Greater Moncton.
Photo: Submitted

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ago



Savannah Awde | Legislature Bureau

Saint John, Moncton, and Fredericton's Chambers of Commerce are pushing the federal government to enforce an end to blockades that have cut off rail service to Atlantic Canada for weeks.

In a statement on Monday, the Saint John branch urged its members to write to MPs and "voice concern" about the ongoing anti-pipeline demonstrations, which have been held across the nation in solidarity with B.C.'s Wet'suwet'en people.

"In addition to preventing access to public transportation for tens of thousands of individual Canadians, these disruptions severely limit the movement of perishable foods and other consumer

items, grain, construction materials and propane for Quebec and Atlantic Canada," the statement reads.

The Saint John chamber launched an online petition last Friday to encourage people to send letters and voice their opinions to MPs in New Brunswick to have the blockades removed.

CEO David Duplisea said the online petition has had an "immediate response" from its 1,000 members.

"We've had over 500 emails sent to members of parliament just in the last couple of days, so it's been doing really well," he said, adding he expects the petition to grow further.

Moncton seeks firsthand stories to bolster case

In an interview with Brunswick News on Monday, Moncton Chamber CEO John Wishart said it has also been active in advocating for more action from the feds, noting that they've put out press releases, letters to MPs, and now a newsletter urging its 800 members to share their stories.

His statements come a few days after Moncton saw its own blockade in the Caledonia Industrial Park on Friday.

"I think primarily if we could get some specific examples of how it is impacting business, those sorts of examples tend to be a little bit more persuasive than just a regular argument," Wishart said.

He added that so far the Chamber has heard from members more generally how New Brunswick industry has felt the interruption of rail service including the situation with propane.

"Certainly the distributors that are in our membership are feeling a squeeze, because you can't get replenished and consequently their customers are feeling or will soon feel a shortage," he said.

"A lot of restaurants use propane, and some factories even use it as a heating source."

He noted that car dealers in Moncton get parts inventories entirely by rail, and predicted they will also soon feel the effects.

Alongside their Moncton and Saint John counterparts, the Fredericton Chamber of Commerce has also been actively communicating with the feds.

"We've sent communication to our local MP, we communicated that to the premier and all of the other MPs in the province of New Brunswick, as well as to our national counterpart Perrin Beatty at the Canadian Chamber," CEO Krista Ross said on Tuesday.

"Time is passing, and each day that passes, we feel our economy has felt a stronger negative impact."

A balancing act

Wishart said he understands the government's predicament in balancing Indigenous rights, climate change, and the economy, but is hoping the government will "disentangle" these issues and facilitate discussion in place of rail disruption.

"With what's happening today in Ontario, we're hoping a resolution is maybe in sight within the next 48 hours," he said, referencing a standoff between Ontario Provincial Police and Tyendinaga Mohawk demonstrators near the rails on Monday, which resulted in several arrests.

"If it goes another week I think we're really going to start to see a longer impact on the Canadian economy."

Via Rail announced Monday night that its Ocean passenger train, running from Montreal to Halifax, would resume on Friday.

Despite recent injunction enforcement and resumed passenger service, Ross said that the chamber remains concerned about the impact of this conflict on their relationship with Indigenous people.

"We have an Indigenous task force at the chamber ... we want that strong relationship, and we are concerned about that," she said.

"It's a complicated issue. And certainly, I don't know what the ultimate answer is ... but what we do know is we need the federal and provincial governments to navigate the situation and get the economy moving again."

— *With files from Noushin Ziafati*



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Suspending the pipeline would mean that illegality won. Do we really want to go down that road.

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CN Rail and CP rail have obtained injunctions from the courts which are legal orders. But it i up the the police of each province to enforce the injunctions. The PM and federal government can not give orders to the police forces of the various provinces. So place the blame where it belongs.

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Elizabeth_Jones_ 1 day ago

Well, people are certainly being forced to see the issues and conflicts, which is what this is all