

Cory Morgan: Canada Urgently Needs Efficient Transportation Infrastructure Within the Country and at Its Ports

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An aerial view of the port of Churchill, Manitoba, in a file photo. John Woods/The Canadian Press



By [Cory Morgan](#)

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Commentary

In 2024, Canada exported 76 percent of its trade goods to the United States. Having only one direct, international border and it being with the largest consumer market in the world, it only makes sense that

Canada became dependent upon its southern neighbour as its top customer.

Unfortunately, that dependence has become a vulnerability given U.S. tariffs that may drive Canada into a recession. If a full-blown trade war breaks out, Canada is poorly placed to weather it due to a lack of development of outside markets for both incoming and outgoing trade goods.

It's fine to try and encourage citizens to "buy Canadian" but it's tough to live that way. Canada is predominantly a producer and exporter of raw goods and natural resources. People may be able to avoid American goods, but locally produced finished products as well as many fresh agricultural goods are limited and expensive.

If Canada is to reduce its reliance on the United States as a trade partner, it must facilitate the movement and trade of overseas goods. That means upgrading and developing intermodal transport within the country by pulling down interprovincial trade barriers and expanding port capacity.

Canada has over 200,000 kilometres of coastline. While much of that isn't navigable, the nation is still blessed with access to deepwater ports on three oceans and is well-placed to ship and receive trade goods around the world. The hardest part of accessing world markets is already out of the way.

Vancouver, Prince Rupert, Montreal, Halifax, and Saint John are already major shipping ports. That said, they also are among the most inefficient ports in the world. According to the [Container Port Performance Index for 2023](#), which assesses the efficiency of container ports globally, Canada's ports rank dismally. Halifax is at the top at 108th while Prince Rupert lands at 399th. In a ranking of large ports by the World Bank, [Vancouver is 347th out of 348](#).

Slow ports lead to increased costs for goods imported or exported. Ships can find themselves waiting for weeks in harbours before they can be loaded or unloaded. That cost makes outgoing Canadian goods uncompetitive on the world market and increases the prices of incoming products for consumers. Canada must up its game.

As with most large projects in Canada, we can't seem to get things done in a timely or cost-effective manner. A port expansion in Montreal has suffered under constant delays and has seen its price tag balloon from [\\$950 million to \\$1.5 billion](#) in just a few years. Attempts to expand the port capacity in B.C. have been met with strong opposition from [from environmental activists](#) and some municipal leaders.

Ports can increase speed and efficiency [through automation](#). Canadian ports are out of date and need upgrades. Unfortunately, attempts to automate ports have led to fierce opposition from labour unions and was [one of the reasons for last November's strike](#) which disrupted Canadian ports for weeks.

Getting products to and from Canadian ports can be problematic as well. Labour actions on [railways disrupted shipping in 2024](#) and caused uncertainty in Canadian markets.

The federal government must step up to facilitate Canada's ability to import and export goods overseas. It must make it clear to special interest groups, unions, and local politicians that infrastructure for global trade is in the national interest and disruptions won't be tolerated.

Provincial leaders must get on board, too. Interprovincial trade barriers on goods and trucking must come down. It's absurd how difficult it can be to move products across the country due to regulatory differences at every provincial border. Canadian premiers [came together to offer a united front](#) in Washington as they tried to head off a trade war. They should use their newfound sense of unity to work on trade barriers within Canada as well.

Premiers should be receptive to expanding infrastructure. Manitoba Premier Wab Kinew has [increased funding to upgrade the Churchill](#) port on Hudson Bay. Every premier in a province with coastal access should be seeking ways to increase shipping ability.

Canada is blessed with an abundance of resources, and the world is hungry for them. Agricultural products, mineral products, and energy products all must be moved in large quantities to be economically viable, and that requires efficient transportation infrastructure within the country and at its ports.

It doesn't matter how much potash is produced, how great a grain crop is, or what the price for metals is if Canada can't get those products to a diverse customer market efficiently. Canada's leaders have an immediate trade crisis to deal with. Beyond that, they must look at the long game to ensure the country doesn't find itself over a barrel in the future as it is today. As long as the nation relies on a single customer, that customer will call the shots.

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