



The Bottom Line

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CANADIAN TRUCKERS CAUSING DISRUPTION ON THE NORTHERN BORDER

Summary

Truck drivers protesting vaccine mandates are parking their rigs in the middle of intersections in Canadian cities, blocking traffic and, in some places, bringing daily life and business to a standstill.

Background

On October 6, 2021, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Deputy Prime Minister, Chrystia Freeland, announced details of Canada's plans to require COVID-19 vaccination across the federal public service and federally regulated transportation sectors.

On October 29, 2021, the United States announced that non-citizen travelers who are fully vaccinated for COVID-19 and have appropriate documentation would be permitted to enter the United States via land ports of entry (POE) and ferry terminals starting on November 8, 2021. This shift eased long-standing restrictions on non-essential travel, consistent with public health guidance.

These positions have since strengthened and currently, the United States and Canada each have mandates blocking unvaccinated foreign nationals, including truck drivers, from crossing the border. Canada's order, which requires U.S. truckers to show proof of vaccination before entering the country, went into effect on January 15. The U.S. mandate, which requires foreign cross-border truckers to be vaccinated, started on January 22.

Current Status

Since the vaccine requirements took effect, CBP has refused entry to only three drivers for not being vaccinated, said Jim Swanson, director of Customs' Cargo and Security Controls Division. As a result, trade and travel largely continued across the border "unimpeded" until the protests began, he said. While the most prominent demonstrations are in Ottawa, "we've had sporadic protests in other locations, with one of the "most impactful" being in Coumts, Alberta, near Sweet Grass, Montana," he said. CBP is also working to relieve the disruption at the Ambassador Bridge between Windsor, Ontario, and Detroit. The Detroit-Windsor tunnel, which is typically limited for commercial operations, can be used as an alternative as long as the conveyance isn't taller than the height restrictions, Thomas Overacker, CBP executive director-cargo and conveyance security said. "I think we recognize these are extraordinary times," he said. One industry participant on the call said the disruptions are resulting in a significant "financial impact" to the automotive industries on both sides of the border that may result in "imminent shutdowns."

On January 22, convoys of truck drivers departed from British Columbia en route to Ottawa, Canada's capital, to protest the vaccine mandate.

Mr. Trudeau initially dismissed the protesters as a "small fringe minority" — a majority of Canadians say they support public health measures intended to slow the spread of the coronavirus — but the protesters are having an outsize impact for their small numbers.

After first blocking traffic in Ottawa, the truck drivers later staged similar protests in other cities, including Toronto, Quebec City, and Calgary, and on the Ambassador Bridge to Detroit, a vital link for the automobile industry. All the towing companies contracted by the city of Ottawa have refused to tow the vehicles, Steve Kanellakos, the city's manager, told reporters.

Prominent far-right figures in several countries, including the United States, Australia, and Germany, have praised the protests. And copycat convoys have already appeared in Australia and New Zealand.

Impact

The Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association (OOIDA) wants U.S. President Joe Biden and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to exempt truck drivers from the countries' cross-border vaccination requirements. OOIDA contends that truck drivers demonstrated that they could operate safely back and forth across the border through the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic. "Since commercial drivers spend the majority of their time alone in their vehicle and outside, there is no evidence that truckers present a higher risk of spreading the virus," OOIDA wrote to Biden and Trudeau. "Because the current cross-border policy disregards the economic contributions of the trucking industry and overlooks the basic operating procedures of the profession, we urge you to immediately exempt professional truck drivers from the proof of vaccination mandate. An arbitrary vaccine mandate should not prevent hard-working men and women from earning a living."

Automotive giants Ford and Toyota announced on February 9 that they were halting some production as the United States-Canada border crossings remained blocked.

Brian Brase, a trucker, said he was organizing a similar protest effort in the United States. According to messages posted on social media, the convoy may start in Sacramento and head to Washington, D.C.

RESOURCES

[CBP Says Canadian Truckers Forcing Adjustments, Will Allow for Cargo Through Detroit-Windsor Tunnel](#) (International Trade Today)

[DHS Releases Details for Fully Vaccinated, Non-Citizen Travelers to Enter the U.S. at Land and Ferry Border Crossings](#) (Department of Homeland Security)

[Trucker Protests in Canada: What You Need to Know](#) (The New York Times)

[OOIDA Asks Biden, Trudeau to Exempt Truckers from Vaccine Mandate](#) (LandLine)

[Canada Trucker Protest Forces Auto Industry Shutdowns](#) (DW.com)