

Blockade at Manitoba-U.S. border expected to end Wednesday, RCMP say

Manitoba premier, justice minister call on Ottawa for 'plan and timetable to relax all border measures'

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Farm equipment and big rigs can be seen blocking Highway 75 at the Emerson port of entry on Tuesday. (CBC)

Demonstrators who have been blocking an integral transportation hub for trade between Manitoba and the U.S. for nearly a week are expected to leave by Wednesday, RCMP say.

"We are now confident that a resolution has been reached and that demonstrators will soon be leaving the area and that full access to the Emerson port of entry will be restored," Chief Supt. Rob Hill with the Manitoba RCMP said in a news release Tuesday afternoon.

Mounties are co-ordinating with people who are still blocking the area and expect the process will be complete by Wednesday.

In a written statement Tuesday, Manitoba Premier Heather Stefanson and Justice Minister Kelvin Goertzen thanked law enforcement for "respectfully de-escalating this situation without the use of force," and called on Ottawa to work toward lifting border restrictions, including the vaccine mandate for truckers that, in part, inspired the protests across Canada.

The federal government should "help ease tensions across our nation by clearly communicating a plan and timetable to relax all border measures for the benefit of all Canadians, including the mandate for truckers, and by collaboratively re-engaging with the U.S. President Joe Biden's administration on these overdue goals," the statement from Stefanson and Goertzen said.



Protesters block Highway 75 with heavy trucks and farm equipment at the Canada-U.S. border crossing at Emerson, Man., on Tuesday morning. (CBC/Radio-Canada)

On Monday, [Prime Minister Justin Trudeau enacted the federal Emergencies Act](#) for the first time in Canadian history, giving the federal government more powers to handle the protests.

Stefanson and Goertzen maintained those powers currently aren't needed here.

"The sweeping effect and unprecedented use of the federal Emergencies Act was not and is not required in Manitoba," they said in their Tuesday statement.

The co-owner of the Duty Free Shop in Emerson disagrees.

"There is a reason they invoked the [Emergencies] Act yesterday, and that's to avoid situations like what I am faced with," said Simon Resch, whose shop has been inaccessible to customers since protesters in a variety of vehicles set up nearby last week.



Simon Resch co-owns the Duty Free Shop in Emerson, Man. He says the blockade threatens to end the family business his father started four decades ago. (CBC/Radio-Canada)

Protesters have largely dictated who comes and goes at the Highway 75 border crossing in Emerson, Man., since moving in last Thursday, though they have also been allowing through emergency vehicles, according to RCMP.

Earlier Tuesday, before RCMP said that the blockade is expected to come to an end, Resch said something needed to be done to get traffic going.

"After two years of the pandemic, and this [blockade] ... we will close if this continues," he said.

Vital border crossing

The Emerson crossing is one of several important land ports for trade at the Canada-U.S. border targeted by protesters calling for an end to not just pandemic restrictions and a federal vaccine mandate for truckers, but also for the resignation of Trudeau and other changes.

In addition to the largest protest in Ottawa, a demonstration at the Manitoba Legislative Building has been going on for two weeks.

Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland said Monday that \$73 million in trade is impacted every day the border remains closed at Emerson.

A provincial spokesperson says 58 per cent of Manitoba's exports and 66 per cent of the province's imports flowed through the Emerson crossing in the first 10 months of 2020 — the most recent data available.

A total of \$18.5 billion worth of trade passed through that crossing during that time frame, and \$24.9 billion came through in 2019, the spokesperson said.

Resch said the blockade comes after two years of intermittent border closures, testing requirement changes and other public health restrictions that have devastated his family-owned store and other travel-related businesses along the border.

He's now at point where he is struggling to afford to keep the lights on, he said.

"If we can't work, there's nothing here for us," said Resch, who grew up in Emerson.

RCMP are expected to hold a news conference in Emerson on Wednesday morning.

The Canada Border Services Agency said Tuesday that commercial traffic is not moving through the border. Passenger vehicle traffic is moving, but slowly, the CBSA said in a statement warning drivers to expect significant delays.

Alternative ports at Boissevain and Sprague in Manitoba and at North Portal in Saskatchewan continue to process commercial traffic, according to CBSA.

With files from The Canadian Press