



August 20, 2024

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## AMM Supports Call to End Rail Labour Dispute

**Nisku, AB, Regina, SK, and Winnipeg, MB, August 20, 2024** – As a nationwide labour dispute looms between Canada’s two major freight railways and the union representing workers at each, the associations representing rural municipalities in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba are extremely concerned about the impacts that a rail work stoppage would have on Prairie agricultural producers, consumers and other industries crucial to rural communities.

The Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA), Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM), and Association of Manitoba Municipalities (AMM) are urging Steven MacKinnon, federal Minister of Labour, to order binding arbitration if the railways and union are unable to reach an agreement prior to Thursday, when labour disruptions would begin. Even a short-term work stoppage will have massive impacts on the agriculture sector, which already struggles to access rail cars to move harvests to market.

*“Canada’s Labour Code allows the Minister to require binding arbitration for situations just like the one looming later this week,” explained Bill Huber, SARM acting President. “Both CN and CPKC provide Prairie farmers with critical access to markets. Without trains running, the livelihoods of thousands of producers are at risk. If Minister MacKinnon does not act on requiring binding arbitration, he and his government must be willing to live with the economic and social consequences the decision will bring across the Prairies.”*

The RMA, SARM and AMM represent rural municipalities in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba respectively. Members of each association provide municipal guidance and services to municipalities that host the vast majority of western Canada’s agricultural production. Across the Prairie provinces, a strong, stable agriculture industry is directly linked to vibrant and sustainable rural communities. Access to rail is an essential aspect of industry and community strength, and it cannot be undermined by labour disputes, particularly when the Government of Canada has tools available to resolve the dispute fairly through binding arbitration.

*“Across rural Alberta, producers of all sizes rely on access to rail to get their product to market. Even a short disruption in rail service may have a domino effect which could lead to long-term industry-wide impacts,” commented RMA President Paul McLaughlin. “From the perspective of Alberta’s rural municipalities, this is not simply a labour issue; it is an economic development issue, it is a community sustainability issue, it is even a food security issue. While I understand that the Minister wants to allow the railways and union as much time as possible to negotiate, not stepping in to protect rural livelihoods and communities will escalate this from a labour dispute into a situation that puts entire rural communities and industries at risk.”*

Much of the grain produced in the Prairie provinces is exported internationally, meaning that without rail access to international ports there are simply no alternative markets available for producers. This creates significant issues locally through strain on grain-handling and storage facilities, as well as related to Canada’s international

reputation as a stable and high-quality agricultural producer. If international customers are unable to trust the reliability and timeliness of Canada’s agriculture industry, they will begin to look elsewhere, which will create a ripple effect throughout the industry and rural communities.

*“Agriculture is a sophisticated, complex, and internationally connected industry based on a complex worldwide supply chain. When one of the first ‘links’ in that chain is compromised, as would be the case if a rail work stoppage occurs, the impacts are widespread, in Manitoba, Canada and across the world,” explained AMM President Kam Blight. “We are very concerned that a work stoppage will not only place several municipalities at risk in the short-term but will create a significant reputational and logistical challenge that could harm local communities in Manitoba and across western Canada for years to come.”*

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### **About Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA)**

The Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) is a trusted and independent association representing Alberta’s 69 counties and municipal districts. Since 1909, RMA has been committed to empowering rural municipalities with strong, effective local governance. Through dedicated [advocacy](#) and a suite of valued business services, including cooperative procurement and group benefits through the [Canoe Procurement Group of Canada](#) and comprehensive coverage through [RMA Insurance](#), we strive to strengthen and support rural Alberta. Learn more about RMA and our impact at [rmalberta.com](http://rmalberta.com).

### **About Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM)**

SARM is the independent association representing rural municipalities in Saskatchewan, serving as the primary advocate for its members before senior governments. For more information visit [sarm.ca](http://sarm.ca).

### **About Association of Manitoba Municipalities (AMM)**

The Association of Manitoba Municipalities supports its member municipalities through advocacy, programs, and services to achieve strong and effective municipal government – the order of government closest to the people.

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